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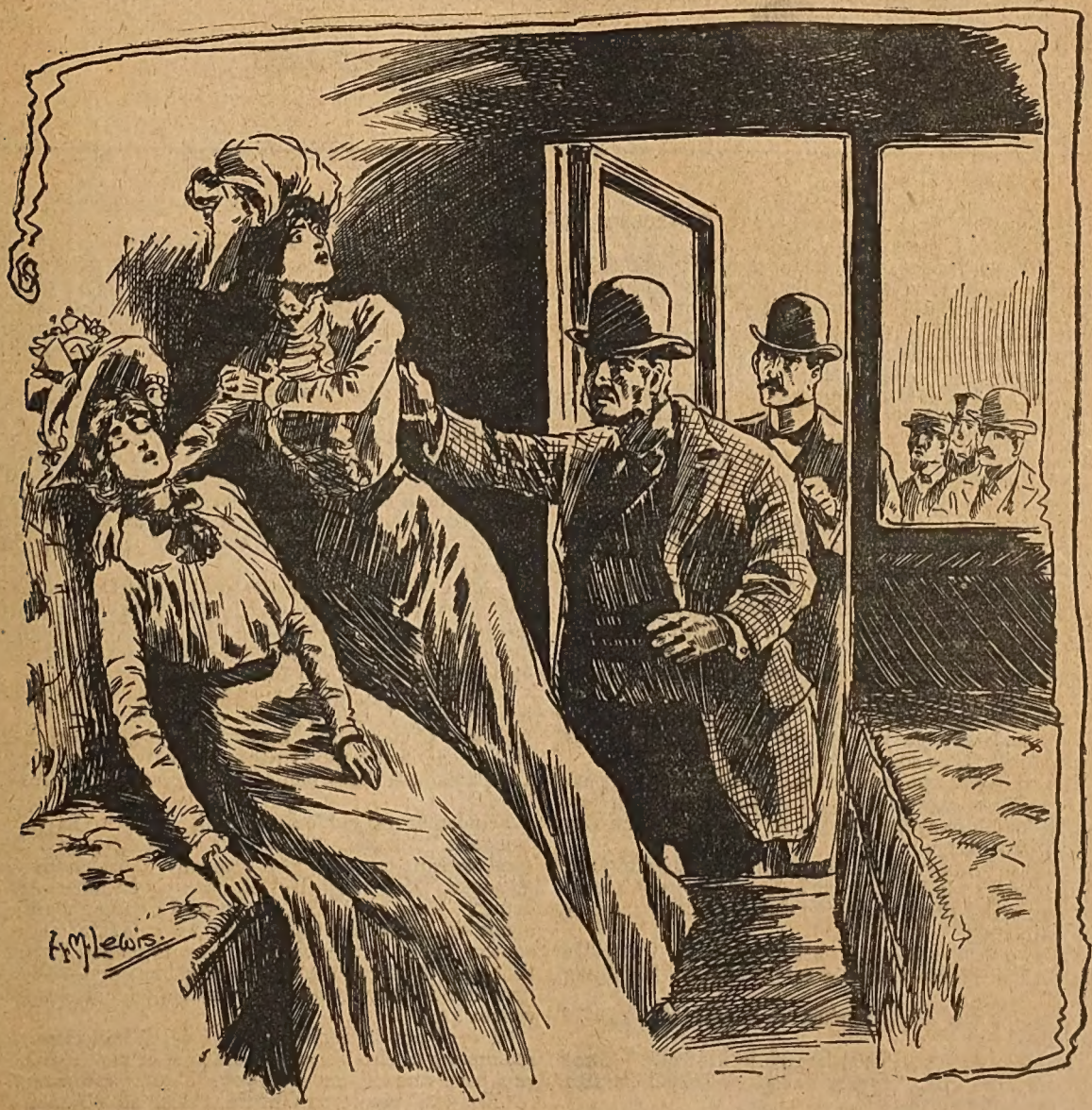

"Help! help!" she cried. "Rescue for Hilda Hatherleigh!"

(See "Adventures of an Actress.")

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

IV.—A Baffled Vengeance.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

At a marble-topped table at one of the best restaurants in Sheffield, two men were sitting.

Before each was a stiff tumbler of brandy and water. Both were smoking cigars. Both had the appearance of second or third-rate actors, very much "down on their luck," while in their bloodshot eyes and dissipated unshaven countenances lurked, it would seem, a hundred evil passions.

"And I tell you, Dan," one was saying in a low voice, "I'll get even with Raymond Venables this time, as sure as my name's Stephen Guttridge."

The other took a long pull at the drink before him. "And I'm with you through thick and thin," he answered gutturally.

The fellow called Guttridge leant forward across the little table. "But how are we to start?" he asked. "Have you any plan?"

"*I have!*" suddenly broke in the voice of a third man, sitting, unperceived by the two maudlin conspirators, at a table almost adjoining the one at which they sat.

The effect of a so totally unlooked for interruption was electrifying. The two men swerved round somewhat unsteadily, and gazed at the other.

"Who the dickens are you?" asked Guttridge wrathfully, "and why do you go and thrust yourself into business that is no concern of yours."

The stranger, who was a dark, tall man, with a somewhat sinister expression, and whose right arm was tightly bound in a sling, was in no wise disconcerted by this display of spleen.

"I am someone who can be exceedingly useful to you," he answered; "and as for your business being no concern of mine, well, I think you'll find that it concerns me very closely indeed."

The two men exchanged stealthy glances. Guttridge cast a furtive glance round the *café*, which was fast filling up.

"Have you a down against Raymond Venables?" he muttered.

The other paused. Then he rose to his feet. "Come with me," he said, "to my hotel. We shall be free from interruption there."

The other two rose instantly, and prepared to follow their mysterious new acquaintance. It then became apparent that in addition to his crippled arm the stranger walked with a slight limp, as though suffering from some affection of the right leg.

Few words passed between the trio until the hotel was reached. The stranger then led the way to a private sitting-room, having first of all ordered liquid refreshments to be sent up—a command that evidently agreed entirely with the wishes of the two bibulous conspirators.

When they were alone the stranger bade his guests be seated.

"To whom have I the pleasure of talking?" he said suavely.

Guttridge rose to his feet with a melodramatic gesture, that betokened beyond a doubt a previous theatrical training, and said grandiloquently: "Mr. Daniel Poindexter," indicating his companion with a grand flourish; "Mr. Stephen Guttridge—very much at your service. And to whom have we the honour of addressing ourselves?"

"John Smith," came the cool answer. Guttridge shrugged his shoulders, and by the wink he bestowed on the self-styled member of the powerful "Smith" family, it was evident that he had his own suspicions as to the authenticity of the name.

"And now to business," said Smith. "You asked me whether I had a down on Raymond Venables, manager of the *Good Samaritan* company on tour. Well, I can answer you in the affirmative. Nay, more, I am anxious to give him a fall. I can't speak plainer, can I?"

Poindexter rapped out an oath. "Curse Raymond Venables," he said. "Last year Guttridge and I had good walking-on parts in a company of which he was manager. And he sacked us, because he said we got drunk. More than that, he warned another manager about us, with the result that we couldn't take on another shop. And now he's come to us here in Sheffield, and if we can't get even with him, well——" the man drank thirstily to lend emphasis to his lust for vengeance.

"I see," put in Smith, "you have indeed cause for attempting to give Venables a dressing-down. I suppose you have already matured your plan of campaign?"

"Not yet," answered Guttridge with an assumed air of carelessness; "but——"

"Then if you will put yourselves entirely in my hands," broke in Smith, "I will not only show you how you can

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get Raymond Venables at your mercy, but also how you will be able to line your pockets at the same time."

Cupidity and re-awakened desire for revenge, fomented by the potations consumed, shone forth from Guttridge's and his comrade's eyes,

"We will follow you to death, if need be," cried Poindexter theatrically.

"Ay, ay," echoed Guttridge.

Smith could hardly restrain himself from bursting out into a loud laugh. The two ex-supers seemed to retain all the flavour of the footlights about their person. Their gestures spoke eloquently of the Adelphi and Drury Lane.

"Then listen carefully," he said. "To-night Raymond Venables, after the performance of his piece, sups with some friends. His lodgings are in East-street, a lonely, unfrequented thoroughfare, of tidy, unpretentious houses. I shall be there at about three a.m., the time when Venables will return. I shall have a vehicle ready. All you will have to do is to lie in wait for him in a doorway, jump out upon him before he has time to shout for help, stun him, and then carry him to my carriage. He will be at our mercy then, beyond recall."

"And you talked about remuneration?" broke in Guttridge eagerly.

"True," answered the other calmly; "but so far you must admit the debt is rather one-sided. If I show you a way how to get the better of your enemy, it is myself who ought to be rewarded."

The faces of the two ex-supers fell. This mysterious Smith had evidently an eye for a bargain.

"Nevertheless," continued Smith, "I will give you £10 apiece, provided that when we have once got Venables in our power you will help me in the furtherance of another little scheme that touches his star, Miss Hilda Hatherleigh!"

"Hilda Hatherleigh," echoed Guttridge in amazement, an expression that was marked as well strongly upon his comrade's face. "Hilda Hatherleigh, the beautiful *ingénue* who has been given the lead in place of Valerie Bellairs! What can you want with her?"

"That is *my* business. All that you need bother yourselves about is whether, for £10 apiece, you are willing to stand in with me, hand and glove. I help you to get hold of Venables, and you help me to get hold of the Hatherleigh. There's no danger. For I've got a plan that will bring the fair Hilda to the net, like a bird, and without any bother at all. Will you accept my offer?"

"We will," the two men cried simultaneously. "You can count on us."

Smith looked closely at his two would-be colleagues in villainy. Could he indeed count upon them? So long as they were not actually hopelessly intoxicated, he believed he could. In their present condition they were just sufficiently primed with "Dutch courage" to make them ready tools. Alcohol was food and drink to them. Under the terrible auspices of brandy these two ex-supers were converted from bombastic cowards into truculent ruffians

And Smith registered a silent vow that not another drop of liquor should cross their lips that night, unaccompanied by food. "Shall we sup?" he said, "then we can discuss with minuteness our plan of campaign." And in this proposition, too, Guttridge and Poindexter found ready acquiescence.

CHAPTER II.

Raymond Venables was in excellent spirits. His supper party had proved most enjoyable, and he was strolling placidly along the deserted streets of Sheffield, smoking a choice cigar, and ruminating over the exceptionally prosperous condition of his exchequer and future prospects.

"That was really a piece of luck at Scarborough," he mused, "when Valerie Bellairs, for some reason or other threw up her engagement and made tracks. I didn't think so at the time. But now that Hazel Harlow has got the lead, why, people buy seats only to see her face. If we go on like this I shall have to make her a good offer to keep her from finding a new and more lucrative shop.

"And she can act, too. Throws herself into it. By Jove! what a beautiful woman she is! If I could only get her to become Mrs. Raymond Venables, why I'd take a theatre in town and run her for all she's worth, which is a good deal.

"Yes, and I love her, too. But she isn't like the ordinary run. There's no stealing a kiss, or taking out to supper, or giving diamonds to Hazel Harlow. She's as straight as she's beautiful, and hang me if I wouldn't give all I'm worth to get her to name the day," from which it will be seen that the manager of *The Good Samaritan* company was about as much in love with his "lead" as it was possible to be.

The rooms that Venables had engaged for his own accommodation had been selected by the manager many years ago on his first visit to the town, and thus he always made a point of securing them whenever business took him to Sheffield.

They were quiet, clean, and above all cheap; for Raymond Venables was ever a man whose first consideration was his pocket.

Without a suspicion of any danger ahead, the manager turned into East Street, his thoughts still fixed upon Hazel Harlow. His hand sought his waistcoat pocket for his latch-key. Suddenly two figures sprang out from the shelter of a doorway. Before Venables could recover from the surprise caused by this unexpected event, one of the men had struck him a heavy blow on the back of the head with a weapon notorious for inflicting a stunning and effective blow—a sandbag.

Venables dropped like a pole-axed bullock. The next instant he was lifted off his feet and borne hastily away, to where a vehicle was drawn up against the kerb.

Without any ceremony the unfortunate manager was driven away through the deserted and dark streets of Sheffield—for it was too early yet for even the first workmen to have set out for the gloomy factories.

The vehicle pulled up at length before a deserted-looking house in a squalid street. The still unconscious manager was lifted out of the conveyance and borne inside the house.

When he recovered consciousness it was to find himself lying upon a pallet, the faint light of the coming dawn striking in through a grimy window above his head. There was only one other occupant of the room, the man "Smith." Of Guttridge and Poindexter there was no trace.

Venables' head ached furiously. "Where am I?" he asked faintly.

"With a friend," answered "Smith" suavely.

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

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"Then why was I knocked on the head and brought here?" queried the manager.

"You were certainly knocked on the head," answered "Smith," with ready mendacity, "by a couple of ruffians, from whom I rescued you and brought you here. The accommodation is not of the best, but such as it is you are quite welcome to it."

"But I need trouble you no longer," cried Venables eagerly. "I am deeply grateful to you for having proved my saviour. I cannot trespass upon your hospitality further. Let me return to my own lodgings without delay."

"Smith" held up his hand.

"One moment, sir," he said. "You have been so generous as to rate my services to you as worthy of gratitude. Will you therefore do me a trifling service. As you see, my hand is in a sling, and I cannot write. Will you write a letter for me? I will then see that you reach your lodgings without more ado."

There seemed nothing outrageous in this request, and Venables at once signified his readiness to comply with it. It would be a cheap way out of his dilemma.

"And you will pass me your word as a gentleman not to betray my confidence in you," continued Smith. "I mean, you will not, when you are safe among your friends again, divulge what I shall ask you to write for me?"

"Certainly not," answered Venables.

"Here then is paper. What I want you to write is as follows:

"Will you accompany the bearer of this note? I am in great distress. It is of the utmost importance to my welfare that you should come in person and alone. Upon your complying with this request hangs, maybe, my life. I cannot explain more.

"R. V."

Venables wrote the note glibly enough until he came to the end. Before adding the two initials he paused, and looked somewhat suspiciously at "Smith." "R. V.," he said. "Why R. V.?"

"Because my name happens to be Ralph Verney," answered "Smith," calmly. "There is no need for you to write my whole name."

Venables was too anxious to escape from his present position to stop to reflect very deeply upon the matter. He had written the note mechanically. His head still ached violently. He only wanted to get away. Hence the irregularities in the proceeding did not touch him very deeply.

"There's your note, then," he said; "and now, sir, may I go? A thousand thanks for your good offices in rescuing me from those footpads. I did not see them distinctly, the scoundrels. One thing, it's quite light now. I shall be able to reach my lodgings without fear of further molestation."

So saying he rose from the pallet that had served for a writing-table, and put his hand in his pocket to assure himself that his latch-key was safe. To his annoyance he found it was gone. A prolonged search failed to reveal it. Ah well, his landlady would be up by the time he got back.

"Smith" accompanied him downstairs. Then for the first time Venables became aware of a fact that he had hitherto disregarded. His rescuer was a well-dressed man, apparently a gentleman. How did he come to be living in that squalid house in a mean Sheffield street? Ah well, it was no business of his. And any how he had escaped from serious injury. It was Shakespeare who said: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." With which comforting assurance Raymond Venables made bold to think he could close the incident. Whereas, in reality, it had scarcely begun.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he reached East Street. His landlady's maid-of-all-work was sleepily imparting a show of radiancy to the front door-step as he drew in sight of the house. The girl stared at the actor in amazement.

Venables, annoyed at her vigorous scrutiny, hurried past her and up the narrow stairs that led to his "suite" of rooms, a bed-chamber and parlour connected by a folding-door.

He was by this time thoroughly wearied, as can be well understood, while his head still ached, unpleasantly reminiscent of the "sand-bagging" he had received only a few hours ago.

He had determined to go straight to bed. He opened the door of his sitting-room and entered the apartment with a sigh of relief, that changed to a faint cry of mingled horror and chagrin as he found that even here there was to be no respite from the adventures that the day had ushered in.

Two men, each armed with a pistol, confronted him—unshaven, truculent beings, whose eyes were bloodshot from want of rest and alcohol—whom Raymond Venables instantly recognised as the two theatrical supers whose dismissal he had been instrumental in obtaining the year before.

"What do you two rascals want here?" he began stormily. "I suppose you are the scoundrels who knocked me on the head and stole my latch-key."

"We want revenge, Raymond Venables," answered Guttridge. "You ruined us, we want to ruin you. Don't make a noise, or I shall put a bullet through you."

With all his faults, Venables was no coward. But his heart sank within him as his eye turned first to one and then to the other of his captors. For in their drink-inflamed countenances he read the lust of vengeance. And he was unarmed, and weak from his recent experience. Hopelessly he looked around him with quick, furtive glances, seeking for some loophole of escape.

Guttridge noted his action.

"The first sound that escapes your lips," he said hoarsely, "signs your death-warrant."

CHAPTER III.

It was nine o'clock on the morning of the same day that had opened so inauspiciously for Raymond Venables. Hazel Harlow, or—to give her her stage-name Hilda Hatherleigh, and Jenny Lovelace, sat at breakfast in the lodgings they shared together.

"I tell you what, Hazel," Jenny was saying, "that Mr. Eric Monteith is over head and ears in love with you. He's a nice chap, too. Don't you care for him?"

"Yes," answered Hazel, slowly, "I like him immensely. But I'm not in love with him. And surely no girl ought to marry unless her heart tells her that she has really met her affinity."

Jenny shrugged her shoulders.

"That's all right enough," she said, "and yet there are hundreds of girls in our profession who marry every day without being a bit in love. Why, I know plenty who would marry Raymond Venables to-morrow, if he'd

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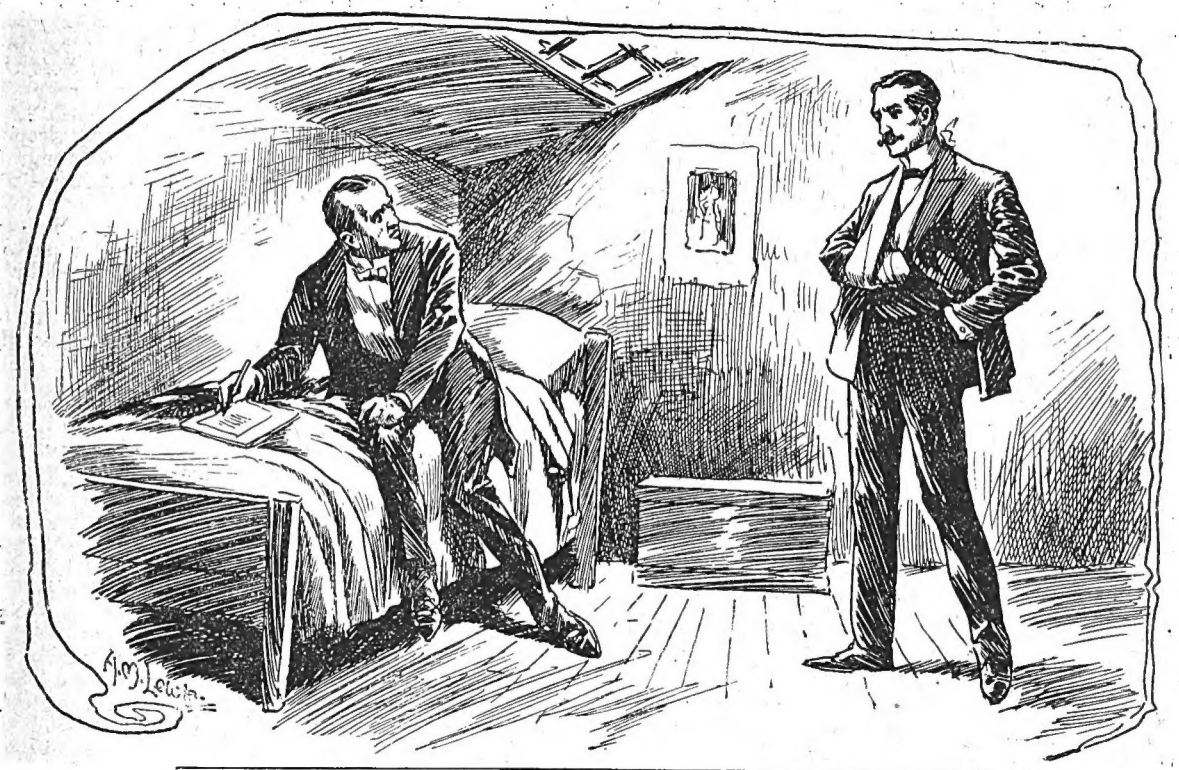

He paused and looked somewhat suspiciously at Smith. "R. V.," he said. "Why R. V.?"

ask them—merely for the chance of getting a part. Yet all the world knows that Master Venables wants to marry his lead, as does every other man who sees her.

Hazel's eyes grew suddenly sad. "It's a terrible thing to be good-looking," she said slowly. "I can't help knowing I am that. To have good looks, and to be upon the stage are synonymous to announcing that you are ready to receive any kind of insult that men care to pay you." Her eyes flashed. "I am going to try and show the world," she said, "that it is possible to be on the stage and still keep oneself unsullied by the world."

Jenny gazed admiringly at her friend. "And I'll stick by you, Hazel," she said fervently.

The conversation then drifted to other topics, the reception of the piece in Sheffield, the prospects of the receipts keeping up.

"I had another proposal last night," said Hazel suddenly, with a smile. "Mr. Clive Pendennis was good enough to offer me his heart and hand."

Jenny burst out laughing. "What an honour!" she cried.

"Yes," answered Hazel, "but I'm slowly getting used to stage methods. It seems to be the correct thing for the men to propose to one in turn. I think they must draw lots as to whose turn is to come next. I expect the property man will be offering himself soon."

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and a maidservant entered with a note upon a salver, which she handed to Hazel.

The note was written in pencil, upon a common piece of notepaper, and enclosed in an envelope upon which was scribbled "Miss Hilda Hatherleigh."

With a growing sense of mystification Hazel read the missive, in the undoubted handwriting of Raymond Venables, which was as follows:

Will you accompany the bearer of this note? I am in great distress. It is of the utmost importance to my welfare that you should come in person and alone. Upon your complying with this request hangs, maybe, my life. I cannot explain more.—R. V.

Hazel read the note through carefully twice. Then she handed it across to Jenny. "What do you make of that?" she said quietly.

Jenny read the few mysterious words as carefully as Hazel had done. "There's no mistaking Venables' handwriting," she said. "I wonder what on earth it means."

Hazel rose to her feet. "Is the bringer of this outside?" she said to the servant.

The maid answered in the affirmative.

"Then tell him I will be ready in a few minutes."

The servant retired.

"You mean to go, Hazel?" cried Jenny.

"I cannot do otherwise than go," came the quiet answer. "Raymond Venables is not the sort of man

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to write a note like that for nothing. I am absolutely at a loss to understand what has happened. But it is plainly my duty to help him if I can."

"Then I will come with you!"

"But the note says 'come alone.'"

Jenny's face fell. "And supposing something should happen to you?" she said.

"I am not afraid," answered Hazel lightly. "I am anxious to know what can have happened to Mr. Venables. It must be that he has met with an accident that necessitates his sending for someone in whom he trusts. I ought to feel proud that he has chosen me to be the means of helping him out of a difficulty."

Thus spoke Hazel, with all the confiding unsophistication of a pure-hearted girl. Not even the terrible experiences she had undergone since her embarkation upon the troubled sea of theatrical life had been able to destroy her trust in human nature. The plausible would always find a ready prey in Hazel Harlow. Yet it was not folly that prompted her to turn a ready ear to the appeals of those who, for all she knew to the contrary, were the most flagrant charlatans. It was merely a superabundance of the milk of human kindness, that and a total inexperience of the dark places of the world around her.

The bearer of the note from Venables turned out to be a rather seedy-looking individual, about whose person there seemed indefinably to cling a faint flavour of the footlights. It was in fact our old friend Guttridge.

"Has Mr. Venables met with an accident?" asked Hazel.

Guttridge nodded.

"Do you know what he wants me for?"

"I only know I was to bring you the note and wait for an answer," answered the ex-super promptly.

"Then you can take me to Mr. Venables?" went on the girl.

"At once, miss."

It did not seem as if there was anything else to be got out of the man, and Hazel prepared at once to accompany him. The fact that the note was indubitably in Venables' handwriting lulled any initiatory suspicions as to its genuineness to rest.

And so the curiously assorted pair set out together. Yet neither observed that Jenny Lovelace had slipped out of the house after them and was quietly following behind them. "Hazel never thinks of danger," the girl muttered to herself, "and there is something about this I don't quite understand."

In the meanwhile Guttridge led his fair companion along the now crowded streets, and down towards that part of the town that lies above the harbour—a district inhabited for the most part by the poorer classes of dock-labourers. Hazel's wonderment increased as she followed her guide. What business could have brought Raymond Venables to such a neighbourhood?

Suddenly Guttridge came to a halt, and, pausing before the door of a gloomy-looking house, gave a peculiar knock. The door was at once thrown open, and a voice said, "Come in."

Guttridge made a sign for Hazel to enter. Stifling a swift pang of apprehension, the girl obeyed his directions.

A man was standing behind the door, evidently he who had thrown it open. "Will you go upstairs, Miss?" he said. "The first door on the left on the top of the stairs."

Mechanically Hazel began to mount the rickety stairs, her wonderment increasing with every upward step. What on earth could be the meaning of this performance? Nothing but the assurance she had received, in the handwriting of Raymond Venables, could reconcile Hazel to the continuation of an adventure that savoured so much of apparently useless melodrama. And yet she could not believe that there was anything approaching danger in her mysterious mission.

She paused for a moment before opening the door at the top of the stairs. Then curiosity overcame her doubts. She quietly turned the handle, to find herself a moment later in a small, barely furnished apartment, in which was a man, standing with his back towards the door, and with bowed head.

Of Raymond Venables there was no sign. The next instant the door behind her closed sharply. She was alone in the chamber with the unknown man, who wheeled round at the sound of the closing door to disclose the hated personality of Horace Caldecott, *alias* Smith, *alias* Ralph Verney—the one man in all the world whom Hazel had reason to fear and loathe.

For a moment Hazel could not believe the evidence of her own senses. It could not be true. She put her hands to her eyes to shut out the hated apparition. Then she turned to the door and tried to open it. It was locked from the outside.

"Once more!" said Caldecott in a low voice; "once more we meet face to face, sweet Hazel. You didn't think to find me in Sheffield. It just shows you what love can do. How quietly you walked into the trap. And now I've got you I don't mean to let you go as I did before."

A low moan came from the girl's lips. This, then, was the meaning of Raymond Venables' note. It had been prompted by Caldecott. How? Surely the manager was not so great a villain as to seek the ruin of the girl he had pretended to love.

Yet, in the face of existing circumstances, all speculation as to Venables' complicity in the affair was useless. The fact that remained poignantly, horribly obvious, was that she, Hazel Harlow, was in the clutches of as unprincipled a villain as had ever laid siege to the heart of a pure and innocent maiden.

"By a foul plot you have lured me here, Mr. Caldecott," the girl said bravely, "even as on a former occasion you tried to entrap me. Yet what can you do? You must know that I can never care for you, indeed I despise you more thoroughly than I do anyone else in the world——"

"Enough," broke in Caldecott roughly. "You should know sufficient of me by this time, to understand that I have made up my mind to possess you, and keep my word I will. Fair means failed, there were only foul ones left. And now I'll tell you what I am going to do. Either you marry me at once, or I take you straight back to Harlow Farm and your father. It will be the same thing in the end anyhow. For your father's only desire is for you to become Mrs. Caldecott, and reign at the Hall. Consent to come with me quietly, to throw up this absurd idea of going on with a stage life, and you shall have my word of honour as a gentleman to be unmolested further. Think, Hazel, what I offer you—a life of ease, with everything that money can offer you, in exchange for the hardships that must be yours if you persist in a theatrical career."

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

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"You need say no more," broke in Hazel. "I had sooner starve in the streets than be your wife, Mr. Caldecott."

The girl's unflinching demeanour and decisively-worded answer, roused a veritable demon of baffled rage and passion in Caldecott's breast. With an oath he sprang forward and drew forth from his pocket a handkerchief—he no longer wore his arm in a sling, it had evidently been a blind to enable him to procure Venables' assistance, as we have seen—into which, with amazing rapidity, he emptied the contents of a small phial.

Before Hazel had had time to realise his purpose, before the scream of terror that rose to her lips could become articulate, the sickening odour of chloroform filled her nostrils. The next moment she had fallen forward into her captor's arms, insensible.

In the meanwhile, Jenny Lovelace had succeeded in following Hazel and Guttridge to the house where the event narrated above, had been enacted. The girl, determined on following Hazel's movements closely, had taken up a position at the end of the street, from whence she could keep an eye upon the building that held Hazel and the mystery surrounding Raymond Venables.

For some time the girl watched without her vigilance being in any way rewarded. Suddenly the door of the house opened and a man issued forth—the same man that had brought Venables' note to Hazel. He hurried away, evidently intent on some errand. Jenny vacillated, Should she follow him, or remain where she was. She decided on the latter course of action.

Five minutes passed away. Then suddenly the sound of carriage wheels echoed along the dingy street. The next moment a cab drew up opposite the door of the house that contained Hazel Harlow and what else Jenny could only conjecture.

But conjecture soon gave way to certainty. The man who alighted from the vehicle to re-enter the house was he that had left it only a short time previously—Guttridge, in fact—though Jenny did not know his name.

In a few moments the house door opened again. Three men appeared, two of them bearing the figure of a girl, whom one horrified glance assured Jenny to be Hazel herself, and insensible. Of Venables there was no sign. The inert body was deposited inside the cab.

One of the three men, evidently a person of more importance than Guttridge and his colleague, entered the vehicle. The next moment the cabman had whipped up his horse, and Jenny realised that Hazel must have been the victim of foul play.

Jenny's agony of mind can be well imagined. She was torn between two courses—the one to go as fast as possible for aid, the other to keep the cab containing Hazel and the unknown abductor in view.

She came to the conclusion that the last course of action would after all be the best. Were she once to lose sight of the vehicle, of what use would it be for her to endeavour to effect a rescue? Sheffield was a big place, and Jenny had but a cursory knowledge of the town. She would have, therefore, to trust to the actual testimony of her own eyes as a guide to the identification of Hazel's unknown destination.

Luckily for Jenny the cab-horse that drew the vehicle she was following had long passed its prime. Its best attempt at a gallop was but a sorry jog-trot, so that the young actress had but little difficulty in keeping her quarry in view

It soon became evident that the destination of the cab lay towards the railway station. Jenny's mystification and fear began to deepen. What *could* be the motive of the unknown man who had so callously carried away the star of the travelling company?

Yet she registered a silent oath that she would at all costs keep her quarry in view. Upon her, weak woman that she was, hung, for all she knew to the contrary, Hazel Harlow's very life itself.

CHAPTER IV.

"HAVE you taken up Mr. Venables' lunch, yet?"

It was nearly one o'clock. The actor-manager's landlady was addressing her small domestic, who looked up with a scared face and at last said:

"Mr. Venables came back at about seven o'clock. An hour or so later two gentlemen came out of 'is room. I haven't seen 'im since."

The landlady stared in blankest amazement at her diminutive help.

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Venables didn't come back till seven o'clock this morning?" she cried. "And whatever d'ye mean about two gents, a-coming out of his room at eight. You must be dreaming."

The maid, realising that she had kept her tit-bits of information too long, began to whimper.

"Sr'help me, it's true!" she said.

The landlady treated her to a withering stare and hurried upstairs to Venables' apartment and knocked vigorously at the door. No answer was vouchsafed. She tried the door. It was locked. Again she knocked, her growing anxiety as to her lodger's safety lending vigour to her knuckles. "Sposin' he's ill," she murmured.

Silence still rewarded her summons. She hurried downstairs and sought out her husband. "Coppock," she said, "come up to Mr. Venables' room and see if you can open the door. I've scraped all the skin off my knuckles, and I can't make him hear. Something must be the matter."

Thus adjured, Captain Coppock, of the mercantile marine, rose to his full height of five foot five and followed his wife with all the pompous roll his short legs could assume.

Following his wife's commands, he proceeded to pound vigorously at the door of the lodger's chamber, accompanying the manual exercise with a fine display of nautical "Yo ho, there's" and other seamanlike expressions. Yet his efforts were no more attended with success than his wife's had been.

"He's either blind to the world or in Davy Jones' locker," said the seaman conclusively.

Mrs. Coppock gave vent to a faint scream. "Not dead, Nathaniel!" she gasped. "We must break the door open."

The gallant seaman rolled up his sleeves, drew back a few paces, and with a fine disregard of consequences hurled himself, shoulder first, at the door. The sound of splintering woodwork was followed by the unceremonious entrance into the room of the human battering-ram, as the door, its lock burst asunder, flew open.

The sight that awaited the captain and his wife, while it proved conclusively the justification of their course of action, was so startling in its entire unexpectedness, that it literally took their breath away and left them standing

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

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speechless and incapable of action side by side in their lodger's room.

Upon the bed lay Raymond Venables, like a trussed fowl. An improvised gag was in his mouth. The sheets and blankets of his bed had been used as thongs to bind him to the couch itself. No wonder that he had been unable to answer his landlady's summons.

Captain Coppock came to his senses first. He strode forward, and, with quick, dexterous fingers, began to unbind the knots that cut so cruelly into Venables' flesh. In a few minutes the prisoner was free.

For a few moments the actor was so cramped he could only sit still and try to induce renewed feelings of life into his limbs. Then he found his tongue.

"I have been the victim of a base plot," he said vindictively. "I got back here at about seven o'clock to find that my latch-key had been stolen and two men had got got into my room here. They threatened to kill me, and finally bound me up like this."

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Captain Coppock.

"Well, to be sure," echoed his better half, more faintly astonished. The recent apparent incoherence of her youthful domestic became more obvious. If only the girl had given voice to what she had seen before so long an interval had elapsed.

Smarting as he was, both from a sense of injured dignity and physical pain, Raymond Venables felt that he could not bear to remain under the commiserating eyes of his landlady and her husband, neither did he care to take them further into his confidence and relate the whole history of his adventures since his supper-party of the night before.

For nearly four hours he had lain helpless on his bed. He determined to go out and obtain some lunch, and then pay a call on Hazel. Little did he dream how intimately was his own recent adventure bound up with the fate of his leading lady.

He ate but a poor lunch. The appearance of the two ex-supers, and the revenge they had taken, coupled with the mysterious connection of the man "Ralph Verney" with the affair, were events each one of which was surely sufficient to account for the manager's loss of appetite.

As regards the hasty penning of the note for "Verney," Venables was beginning to think that he had been more anxious to buy his freedom, at any cost, than prudence really dictated. Supposing that the note covered some sinister design on the part of the stranger. "Confound it," said Raymond Venables, "I've never had a more uncomfortable day in my life before."

He left the restaurant and hurried round to Hazel's lodgings. Just as he reached the house a man came down the few steps that led up to the front door.

With a growing sense of mystification, Hazel read the missive.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

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"Mr. Eric Monteith," muttered the manager, "the man that was always dangling after Hazel at Scarborough. I wonder what he's after."

No sooner did Monteith's eyes light upon Venables' figure than the young man hastened up to the manager.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Venables," he said, "can you tell me where Miss Harlow is?"

The manager answered rather stiffly.

"No, Mr. Monteith," he said, "I cannot," and would have passed on, but the other stopped him.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Venables," he said, "I think this is in your handwriting," and he thrust the note the actor had written that morning for the pseudo Ralph Verney, the note which had led Hazel into so serious a predicament.

Venables went white to the lips.

"In heaven's name," he gasped, "where did you find that?"

"On Miss Harlow's sitting-room table."

"On Miss Harlow's table!" echoed the other faintly, the sweat standing out on his forehead in great beads, "Then there's foul play somewhere!"

"Foul play! What d'ye mean?"

Eric spoke roughly, but Venables was in no state of mind to resent his tone.

"I can't tell you the story in the street," he answered. "Come inside Miss Harlow's room, and I'll tell you every thing I know."

And in a few moments the two men were seated in Hazel's sitting-room, and Eric grew sick with horror as he listened to the story we know already, and in which he could see, with fatal distinctness, the hand of the villain, Horace Caldecott. Once before he had tried a fall with Caldecott, and had come off victorious. But this time the scoundrel had stolen a march upon him. He gnashed his teeth together in impotent fury and agony of mind. And Venables, as he watched his hearer's face, realised that the careless desire for freedom that had made him write the fatal note, had perhaps cost him not only his leading lady, but his honour and all hopes of making Hazel his wife as well. Could nothing be done to bring the scoundrel Caldecott to book?

CHAPTER V.

Horace Caldecott sat, white-faced and sullen, in one corner of the vehicle he had chartered to bear away the unconscious Hazel to her fate.

As the cab rolled slowly onward, and as the girl began to show no signs of returning consciousness, his exultation in the fact that he at last held her in his power began to be tempered with feelings of apprehension.

He had no desire for her to regain consciousness until they were on the train that would bear them away from Sheffield towards London. And yet supposing that he had been too liberal with the use of the chloroform! How still she lay! Yet how beautiful she was. Caldecott's black eyes gloated on every line of her white face, every curve of her glorious figure. "By heaven, but I won't lose her now," he muttered hoarsely. "I'd sell my soul for her."

But he had little time for sentiment just then. The cab had turned into the station enclosure and pulled up with a jerk. In a moment Caldecott had opened the cab-door and leapt outside.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said to the Jehu, "my wife's still unconscious. I will go and get our tickets and some brandy. If she doesn't recover I shall have to get someone to help me get her into the train. Just keep your eye on her. And cabby"—the villain's voice sank to a confidential whisper—"it's as well to warn you that if she does come to herself she may be violent, and say all sorts of extravagant things. You must keep her quiet somehow. I'll square with you when I come back."

The cabman touched his hat. He supposed it was merely a repetition of a story that was too painfully common, a young wife addicted to drink, and a husband who had to bear the brunt of the sad state of affairs. Ah, well, it was no business of his. There was no fear of the girl coming round as the husband had suggested. She was evidently dead drunk.

Thus musing, he gathered up his reins and sat motionless on his box, awaiting Caldecott's return.

The latter hurried away to the booking-office and bought two first-class tickets to London. There was a train due out in about ten minutes. Once get Hazel safely aboard and he felt he could snap his fingers in the face of any chance of losing her. "There's no Mr. Eric Monteith on the spot now to come to spoil sport," he muttered to himself. "You're mine now, Hazel. Ay, and will be body and soul ere long," and the fierce light of a devilish passion burnt in his eyes.

Not five minutes had elapsed from the time when he had left the cab, and all his business was concluded. Nothing now remained but to get Hazel on to the train with as little fuss as possible. It would merely be a case of "palm-oil," that, and a continuance of the glib plausibilities at which Horace Caldecott was such an adept.

He retraced his steps to the vehicle. The man was quietly seated on the box. Everything seemed as he had left it. Caldecott's heart began to beat with quicker pulsations in anticipation of the triumph in store, the triumph over Hazel Harlow and the loathing she bore him. For Caldecott's passion had made him blind. He saw no obstacles in the path of his desires, he saw only the goal ahead, the end he had longed for so ardently, with all the baseness of a soul already depraved and hardened beyond belief.

He opened the door of the cab. The next instant he had staggered back as though struck in the face by a whip. "I must be dreaming," he murmured hoarsely. *For there were two women in the cab!* The one was beyond doubt Hazel, and just as he had left her, still white, mute, and unconscious, the other was a small, dark-featured woman, pretty in a way, whose right arm was round Hazel, and whose bosom pillowed the beautiful head of Caldecott's victim.

It was no dream. Caldecott realised that in a moment. He thrust his head inside the cab. "Woman!" he muttered hoarsely, "how dare you intrude thus upon my wife's privacy? Leave the cab this instant, or I summon the police."

"Your wife!" answered the girl, in whom my readers will doubtless recognise the intrepid Jenny. "Your wife!" and the scorn in her voice lashed the man's understanding. "Villain! Abductor! Do you think you can carry off Hilda Hatherleigh, the idol of Sheffield, so easily? Why, I followed you. I slipped inside the cab while you were gone, and now, unless you take to your heels, I will scream for help. And then you will be lynched!"

There was something in the girl's voice that made

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Caldecott realise that she meant every word she had said. A murderous light sprang up in his eyes. Baffled rage and lust fought for mastery in his voice, as he said almost incoherently: "Get out of the cab. I'll kill you if you don't get out, I say!"

The commotion had by this time aroused the attention of the lethargic driver of the cab, who clambered off his box, and, with great astonishment visible on his countenance, came to Caldecott's side just to hear the latter's last remark.

"What's up?" he said. "Has she turned obstreperous?"

Caldecott looked fixedly at the man. He determined on making one last effort to get rid of Hazel's unknown champion.

"There's a fool of a woman who says my wife's not drunk," he whispered rapidly. "She's got inside the cab. I'll give you a hundred pounds if you'll get her out. My train goes in a few minutes. I must catch it. A hundred pounds, I say!"

The cabman rapped out an oath. A hundred pounds was a lot of money. And if— He tore open the cab door, and prepared to pull Jenny out by main force. But he had reckoned without his host.

Jenny determined on playing her trump card. Flinging her arms tightly round Hazel, she gave vent to a scream that rang out with startling distinctness. "Help Help!" she yelled. "Rescue for Hilda Hatherleigh!"

For a moment Caldecott stood petrified with amazement. Then his astonishment gave way to fear. He knew that the scales had turned against him now. He had played his stake and lost—lost through the cursed interference of a chit of a girl.

He gave one swift glance around him. From every side people hurried up, drawn to the spot by Jenny's frenzied screams—porters, passengers, policemen, pedestrians passing outside the station, all dashed towards the unexpected centre of attraction, the harmless-looking cab inside the station precincts.

The next moment Caldecott took to his heels. Fear lent him wings. The London train was moving out of the station as he raced down the platform. He flung open a carriage door and tumbled pell-mell inside. To his intense relief it was empty. He was safe from pursuit now.

Safe from pursuit! This then was the end of the scheme he had elaborated so carefully. For the third time he had been foiled in his attempt to abduct Hazel Harlow. In vain the subtle use he had made of the two ex-supers and their childish desire for revenge against Raymond Venables; in vain the cunning way in which he had coerced the manager to be the unconscious tool for Hazel's abduction; in vain the further details of the vile plot he had nursed so carefully towards completion.

And now he was further away from Hazel than ever. Yet that very fact made him wish to possess her all the more. "I'll have her yet," he muttered, as pale and savage-eyed, he sat in the corner of the carriage. "I'll have her yet!"

* * * * *

"What is to be done?" cried Raymond Venables, half beside himself. "What can I do to retrieve the hideous blunder of which I have been guilty? Why, Mr. Monteith, I'd give my soul to be able to save Hazel Harlow."

Eric did not answer for a minute or so. Such wild expressions of sentiment, coming from the lips of the man who had, unwittingly, yet surely betrayed Hazel into the hands of her enemy, were distasteful in the extreme to his quiet steadfast nature.

"We must communicate with the police," he said at last. "I don't see what else we can do. Every hole and corner of Sheffield must be ransacked. Huge rewards must be offered. It's terrible to think how much precious time has been wasted."

At that moment an interruption occurred. The noise as of a vehicle drawing up outside the door, accompanied by the sound as of a great concourse of people following after it fell on the ears of the two men. They rushed to the window which was open. A strange sight awaited them.

A cab, drawn by a miserably thin horse, had stopped at the door. Following the vehicle was a crowd of men and women that seemed to fill the narrow street.

The next moment the cab door opened. A girl got out, supporting on her arm another female figure. A dozen or so of the bystanders thronged round this couple, all evidently anxious only to offer assistance.

One glance told Eric and his comrade who the two girls were.

"Hazel Harlow and Jenny Lovelace!" cried Venables.

And thus was Hazel Harlow brought back to her friends, in triumph like a Queen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE theatre was packed to suffocation that night.

The story of "Hilda Hatherleigh's" attempted abduction, and the dramatic way in which she had been rescued by Miss Lovelace, had got about all over Sheffield. Everyone was anxious to convey to the beautiful young actress genuine and hearty expressions of congratulations for her escape.

Before the rise of the curtain, Raymond Venables went in front. A roar of applause greeted the manager's appearance in front of the footlights.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "I have come here before the commencement of our play as the mouthpiece of Miss Hilda Hatherleigh. I regret to say that Miss Hatherleigh will be unable to appear in her *role* to-night, as she is suffering from a severe nervous shock due to the terrible experience she has gone through to-day, and has been expressly forbidden by medical orders from acting to-night. She hopes that you will forgive her non-appearance, and thanks you most heartily for the generous way in which you have shown sympathy for her accident." With which Venables gracefully withdrew.

The disappointment of the audience at the non-appearance of the new and beautiful star was tempered somewhat by the fact that Jenny Lovelace, whose name had figured largely in everyone's mouth that evening, appeared as usual. The young girl received a tremendous ovation, which, if anyone deserved she assuredly did, for she had behaved with wonderful bravery and presence of mind.

[The next place on the tour list of *The Good Samaritan* company was Newcastle. Here Hazel Harlow was to encounter an adventure of a quite different calibre to the one related in this issue of SHORT STORIES; but one that was to be scarcely less terrible in its danger to her existence as an actress.]

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

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A Mercenary Motive.

Arthur Leslie laid on the table the new Society paper at which he had been glancing, and stared thoughtfully at the opposite end of his comfortably-furnished study. He remained so long in that attitude that his cigar went out, and the wind passing gently through the open window scattered the written sheets of foolscap one by one over the floor.

Leslie did not purchase Society weeklies as a rule, and it would have puzzled all his friends to understand why he descended to such a frivolity on the present occasion. Leslie would have been equally at a loss to give any other answer than his favourite one of "fate."

He had only read one paragraph—that which gave a few details about a grand reception in Piccadilly; in it he had read about the beautiful Lady Carstone, together with some observations by the writer on the surprising fact that the lovely and comparatively youthful widow should remain in her present position when she might have half a dozen titled and desirable bachelors or widowers for the asking—or, as the writer remarked with an attempt at wit, "for merely permitting herself to be asked."

It was this paragraph which had brought on Leslie's meditative mood. It was not his wish to go back over the past. It was an integral part of his creed not to sorrow over that which is dead; but he could not help himself this time, for memory proved stronger than will.

Arthur Leslie, F.R.S., etc., although only thirty-five, had earned a great reputation in the world of science as an electrical expert. He had been one of the few men keen enough to recognise in the early days of the science that electricity was the power of the future. He had devoted himself to it, and by dint of hard work had gained his present position. He was known among his friends as a grave, matter-of-fact scientist, quite above the smaller things of life, and almost entirely devoid of humour. No one had ever seen him laugh; and although in his lectures there was an occasional witticism it was far more akin to sarcasm than humour. Had those friends been able to follow Leslie's present thoughts they would have found in it an explanation of his hardness.

His mind carried him back twelve years, when he was struggling to earn a living in an office during the day, and working hard during every spare moment and far into the night at his favourite study—electricity—and at the other subjects necessary to pass an examination at London University. He had already attracted some attention by his contributions on electrical appliances in technical journals, but the object of his ambition seemed well nigh unattainable, and in moments of discouragement he felt inclined to give up entirely, and resign himself to the life of a clerk in a commercial firm.

Then came to Arthur Leslie a period which comes to most men who try to rise in life—a period of intense discouragement, when everything goes wrong, or seems to, and when the very sight of favourite books or tools makes him feel sick. At that moment it requires but another straw of failure to send a man wrong for ever; at that moment he is ready to clutch at anything to save himself.

It was when Arthur Leslie had reached this stage that he was brought into contact with Mr. Stevens and his daughter Marian.

At the urgent request of a friend, who gave him a ticket, he attended a conversazione at one of the learned societies. He was standing listlessly in a corner, gazing, with feelings of bitterness, at the apparently happy people who thronged the hall, "Come with me, quick!"

He was hurried towards a gentleman whom he knew to be an authority on electrical engineering, who, after a few words of introduction and greeting, told Leslie that he wished to introduce him to someone who wished to make his acquaintance and might help him in return. A moment later, the wondering young man was shaking hands with a gentleman about fifty years of age.

"I have read several of your contributions to the electrical papers, Mr. Leslie," said the gentleman, "and I was much pleased with them. I made enquiry this evening in order to find out if you were here; hence our meeting. I think you can help me."

Leslie was more astonished than ever. He had been told that the stranger might help him.

"I am an amateur in electricity—which means that I study it and work at it for amusement," said the gentleman apologetically. "I am trying to perfect an idea for a new dynamo; if I can realise my idea I shall revolutionise electrical engineering. Now, there was a passage in your last article which struck me very forcibly, and it leads me to think that if we joined hands we can complete the invention. I am rich, and willing to pay for the help you give me; but of course the invention is mine, and the new dynamo will bear my name."

Leslie uttered a few half audible words, and Mr. Stevens continued:

"Come to my house and have lunch with me to-morrow, then we can talk quietly."

This was Leslie's chance. He was not perfect; and he resolved to cling to Mr. Stevens like a parasite and without scruple in order to lift himself from his present position.

Leslie accepted the invitation, and at the table he met Marian.

Although they were unable to accomplish the desired object, the two men evolved other ideas, and Leslie visited Mr. Stevens at least once a week. The greater part of the time occupied by his visit was spent in the study or laboratory with Mr. Stevens, but he never failed to have

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a few minutes with Marian; and by the termination of his third visit he had determined to win her, and was more set upon conquering in the domain of Cupid than in the kingdom of electricity.

Marian was enchanting, and willing to receive Leslie's advances. At last he ventured upon a definite expression of his love; Marian listened with evident pleasure, but gave no definite reply—only bidding him wait. This was enough for Leslie, who now felt that he was within reasonable distance of happiness.

His connection with Stevens had been profitable to him, and he had been able to throw up his situation and live on the results of his pen and sundry commissions which he had received from engineering firms on the strength of Stevens' recommendations. He had gradually given up studying for the London University examination, and was taking life more easily, confident in his ability and with the hope of sharing the wealth of Mr. Stevens when he should marry Marian. For there was now no doubt that the young lady was distinctly encouraging him.

They had pleasant interviews in her father's house, they met in the Park and at Picture galleries, as well as at some Society gatherings to which he contrived to get an invitation; and at all these gatherings he spoke to her with a tenderness and freedom that seemingly left no doubt as to his feelings, while Marian raised his hopes to the level of certainty, and set his heart beating at a rapid rate by a drooping of the eyes, coquettish speeches, and glances, and other feminine wiles.

"I am going away to Neuenahr," she said to him suddenly one August afternoon, just as he had taken advantage of the fact that they were alone to begin an incoherent request for her hand.

He stopped abruptly; he had several times been on the point of making this request, which he regarded as a mere formality—for, he argued, she knew that he loved her and that she loved him—but he had delayed his request for some unknown reason. That she should now stop him so coolly with the information that she was going abroad for a holiday, sent a chill through him.

"But—when you return, Marian," he stammered, "may I hope— Your affection, your love, will not change? When you return, I may claim you?"

"Lady Carstone, let us be frank. I began from mercenary motives, and ended by becoming madly in love."

"Of course, you foolish boy," she returned lightly. "I shall be away for six weeks, and everything will go on again just as usual when I come back."

He leant forward as if to kiss her; she half drew back to avoid it, but apparently changed her mind and permitted the embrace.

Although vexed that she should be out of his reach for the next six weeks, Leslie was exultant in the thought that he had won the prize. His days of struggling poverty were over, and he could look forward to a life free from those cares which accompany want of money and the necessity to earn one's living.

By the end of the first week he found that he missed the girl more than he had believed possible. He had wished to correspond during the interval, but she had laughingly said that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that it would be best not to enter into correspondence while she was away.

Leslie was busy with work for Mr. Stevens and others, so it was not because his mind was unoccupied that he

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

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longed for a letter or some token of remembrance from Marian. Why was he thus troubled? This question occurred to him one morning during the second week after the postman had passed his door, and the answer which came to him startled him and made him pace up and down the room.

"Yes," he said, half aloud, as he resumed his seat a few minutes later, but not to work. "I am in love with Marian! I began to court her because I thought it was the high road to worldly advancement, and only for that reason; and I find that I am caught in the meshes, and that I have gradually and unconsciously come to love her.

"In my own eyes I am a mean-spirited wretch for having tried to win a girl for her money; but I believe that she thinks me sincere. And I am sincere now. I was sorely tried when this temptation came to me, and I was weak enough to yield. I hate myself for it now, and I swear that my love for her shall act as the spur to endeavour, and as the guide to keep me in the path of nobility and honourable conduct. The life of ease which I had mapped out for myself shall give place to a life of work, and I will make a name for myself that will be honoured throughout the country, and which she will be proud to bear!"

This awakening marked a new era in the life of Arthur Leslie, and he set to work with an energy and a determination even greater than he had exhibited in the old "office" days. His love had brought back nobility of purpose, and he eagerly awaited the return of Marian to ask her to promise that she would wed him when he was able to offer her a worthy position.

"I will not ask her to marry me now, as I wish to avoid all semblance of mercenary motive. And I feel sure that she will wait for me."

Marian came back, and he took the earliest opportunity of seeking an interview with her. She welcomed him coldly, and displayed her left hand in such a way that he should see a ring on the third finger.

"What does that mean?" he asked hoarsely.

"I am engaged to be married to Sir Thomas Carstone, Mr. Leslie," she replied frigidly.

"But your promise to me?"

"Oh, that was—— Of course, we were only having a little fun together," she said with a laugh, although her cheeks coloured slightly. "You must have known that with my money I could marry a title."

Arthur Leslie left the house without exchanging another word with Marian Stevens. She was a heartless coquette, he said to himself, but he had no right to complain; he had played with her, so the reward was a just one, and the fact that he now really loved her could not be taken into consideration.

It was a severe lesson, but Leslie was now strong enough to learn it and take it aright. It had taught him that whatever he did should be done from honest motives, and that any other line of conduct would sooner or later meet with a fitting reward.

At the end of seven years, Arthur Leslie had reached a point which was very near to the summit of his ambition. He had gained a University degree, he had been elected Fellow of a famous society—one of the few distinctions that can only be gained by merit—he was a professor, and his income was larger than he had ever dreamt that it could be. It was even mooted that, in spite of his youth, he would soon receive the honour of knighthood in recognition of his services to science.

Many a woman would gladly have shared the fortunes of the clever scientist, but it was currently believed that he was a woman-hater. He was courteous to ladies when thrown in contact with them, but he never sought their society, and never indulged in pretty compliments. He heard from time to time of Lady Carstone, and knew that she was a widow. He saw her occasionally at some social gathering, but he invariably avoided her. It was as nearly as possible seven years after her marriage with Sir Thomas that he was brought face to face with her and spoke to her.

He could not avoid it this time, for the hostess had deliberately conducted him to her. He had to talk to her, and she asked him to explain some natural phenomena, and gradually contrived to get him to a recess where they could talk without interruption.

"Professor Leslie," she said with assumed frankness, "I did you a great wrong some years ago, and I have never ceased to regret it. I married for position instead of love."

Leslie looked at her curiously. He was accustomed to analytical methods, and although he could not claim to possess a very close knowledge of feminine ways, yet he was sufficiently a student of human nature to be able to penetrate below the surface of her words. He was able to look calmly on the past, and he had long since recognised that the girl had never cared for him, and had only been playing with him. Lady Carstone's words amused and yet irritated him; he was amused at this attempt to capture a man who could give her a far more important position in Society than the old man she had wedded, and he was irritated by the daring attempt.

"When did you discover that, Lady Carstone?" he asked, keeping his voice and features under perfect control. "Was it before or after your marriage that you discovered you were in love?"

It was a cruel thrust, but he could not resist it. As he had half expected, she evaded the question.

"Have I not said that I married for position instead of love?"

She felt that he was judging her correctly, and she was uncomfortable. Her attempt had failed, and she wished to escape the consequences of defeat. She rose to go, but he detained her.

"Lady Carstone, let us be frank. I began from mercenary motives, and ended by becoming madly in love. The girl I loved was only amusing herself with me, and never loved me. She wanted a position then—and she wants it now My love died a natural death as the result of the awakening, but the experience made a nobler man of me. I am not the only being who is capable of learning a lesson."

They parted, and he had never spoken to her since.

That was five years ago, yet she was still Lady Carstone, although he knew that the writer in the Society paper was correct when he said that she might have any one of at least half a dozen titled men. Had she discovered that she really loved the man with whom she had flirted? And if so——?

"No, no!" murmured Leslie, as he laid down his cigar and picked up the scattered sheets of his lecture for the Royal Institution. "The girl I loved was not the Marian Stevens who married Sir Thomas Carstone, but a Marian Stevens who existed only in my own brain. If it had been otherwise——."

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

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Miss Letitia's Trousseau.

LETITIA HOUGHTON was going to be married; consequently many of her dear feminine friends said it was a shame, a scandal, for Letitia to think of such folly at her time of life. These same authorities declared she was fifty-five years old, adding there was no fool like an old one.

Letitia was on the sunny side of forty-five, but did not look as if she were forty, being handsome, with a pretty home, a tidy income, a kind heart, and a sound head.

The beneficiaries of her bounty had become accustomed to consider her a spinster, too confirmed a devotee to single blessedness to change her state. What right had that old thing to be taken in by an impecunious adventurer, when she had friends of her lifetime who naturally expected—she had no kinspeople—to be remembered in her will; not that they were mercenary, but that they had a sort of claim upon her.

Remarks of this kind were freely indulged in when the invitations were received. Twenty-five or thirty women talking at once is rather confusing, and as the speakers became excited the comments became more personal and assumed an ill-natured turn. It was at a church sewing circle, and tongues were flying faster than needles.

An exceedingly pretty and richly dressed woman, a guest of the society, now took up the cudgels in defence of the absent.

"Ladies, ladies, is this a modern school for scandal, or a church society held in the basement of a sacred edifice? You all have cause to be grateful to Letitia; why should you speak of her so bitterly now, because she exercises the right we have all claimed?"

Mrs. Alyn Alden was a leader of society, whose dictum made or unmade a newcomer entering the charmed circle. Mrs. Jennie, as Mrs. Alden was generally called, was a power, and with promptitude they proceeded to eat their words with marvellous celerity.

Mrs. Jennie smiled and bade them good morning. On the way to Miss Letitia's she made a gesture as if she had touched an ill-smelling weed.

"What a power of harm such women can do at times! I do not pose as a reformer, but I really would like to recall the ducking-stool for their benefit. Poor Letitia! I hope she has not chosen unwisely."

Her musings ceased as the coachman drew rein before the pretty, old-fashioned garden of the Houghtons. Mrs. Jennie was met in the yard by the bride-elect, whose fresh and fair complexion had defied the ravages of time. With her bright hazel eyes and wavy light brown hair she might have passed for thirty-five at most.

"Come into the house, Jennie; it's lovely out here amongst the flowers, but I have some things I wish to show you; the dress has come; I am too old to be married in white satin, so I selected a pink brocade trimmed with lace. I have never had so many pretty clothes made at one time in my life, for I never needed to. I don't think I'm envious, but when I saw all my friends' handsome outfits it occurred to me that it would be an inducement to marry. Do you not like it?"

"But where did you meet the man you expect to marry, Letitia? I would not give my life into the keeping of an utter stranger."

"You needn't be uneasy about me; he's a very pleasant man, and I'm positive we will get on well together; as for love, we are not young people, and have said nothing about that, but we will do well enough as friends. Do you notice that black and gold visiting silk, Jennie?"

Mrs. Jennie perceived that the bride-to-be preferred to talk about her clothes instead of the man she had promised to marry, and made no other effort to drag him into the conversation. Miss Letitia brought every article for Mrs. Jennie's inspection.

"Do stay to lunch; I've so much to tell you yet! I want it understood that I meant what I said when I wrote on the cards I didn't want any presents; please make your friends understand that, will you? I know that they will want to give me presents; you can't know how glad I am that I am liked, Jennie."

Mrs. Alden would not shake Miss Letitia's faith in the professions of friendship she believed sincere, but when their spiteful comments were recalled it angered her afresh with them.

For that purpose, Mrs. Jennie drove back by the church, where she found the society dispersing. She did not alight, but told them of Miss Letitia's wish.

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

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She of the sharp tongue gave a shrill little cackle and said:

"That means we must give them without fail. She's afraid we won't give anything, and takes that means to make sure."

"Was that the reason you had 'No flowers' on the cards when your daughter graduated? Letitia's bouquet was weighted with a jewelled butterfly. So glad you enlightened me. I have wondered why that clause was inserted, but had no idea it meant exactly opposite to what it said. It is never too late to learn—wisdom. Good-morning; I must go home."

Mrs. Ponsonby gazed after the carriage, and said to her dear familiar friend:

"Mrs. Alden does have the knack of taking one by surprise; she confuses a person so. Of course, I didn't mean—that is, I didn't intend to own——"

"That you look that way of assuring Sophy a number of bouquets and presents? I thought you didn't mean to say that, dear, did you?" suggested the friend sweetly.

* * * * *

Miss Letitia's wedding day had arrived. She was looking extremely handsome and accepted the effusive compliments of her friends in apparently good faith; they declared she did not look a day over forty.

As yet the groom had not made his appearance; Miss Letitia had excused herself a moment or two, but as the minutes lengthened into an hour without her returning, significant glances were exchanged and the buzz of many voices was heard.

It is astonishing how much pleasure some people derive from the distress or mortification of their friends. Mrs. Ponsonby and her *coterie* were insinuating that something was wrong, voicing pity which their eyes and countenances belied.

Thoroughly exasperated, Mrs. Jennie was about to give a crushing retort, when Miss Letitia reappeared.

She was slightly pale, her demeanour a mixture of regret and dignity, while a blending of defiance was depicted in her erect attitude.

"I've had a telegram from Mr. Langworthy; business of a family nature, which I shall not be at liberty to divulge indiscriminately, compels him to start for Europe as he sent the message off; consequently there will be no wedding to-night. That need not interfere with our enjoyment of the supper; the presents will be returned to their donors to-morrow. Mr. Alden, will you see me to the table? The minister will take you, Jennie."

Her astounding revelations called forth a chorus of "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and a dozen excited women began to ply her with questions, protesting against her returning the presents, but she waived them aside.

She gave her guests no time to discuss her affairs in groups, but marched them into the dining-room, some wearing, from the undiminished pangs of curiosity, an expression as if they were being led to instant execution.

Miss Letitia was the life of the party, and the theory that she had been jilted did not gain ground; her explanation was accepted as true—as far as it went. More than one face became blank when Miss Letitia said:

"Jennie, be sure to come round to-morrow and help me to pack those presents; some are so—valuable I will not be satisfied until they are returned; fortunately all are labelled."

"I will come with pleasure, Letitia," replied Mrs. Alden, while Mrs. Ponsonby whispered dolefully: "If she would ask me!"

Early next morning Mrs. Jennie accordingly put in her appearance, finding her friend in exceedingly good spirits.

While tying up a gaudy plated cake-stand, a gift from Mrs. Ponsonby, Mrs. Alden said:

"Letitia, why return the presents? Were you in earnest when you said there was not much likelihood of there being a marriage?"

Miss Letitia was bending over the bed, replacing a handsome silver ladle in its velvet box.

The constrained position may have been the cause of her heightened colour. Her face, as she turned towards Mrs. Alden, wore conflicting expressions; triumph, shame, and over all a half-sad, half-defiant look. Her first words were apparently irrelevant:

"I've learned much, Jennie," she said, as she folded a dozen fine thread-cambric handkerchiefs, and placed them with lingering regret in the costly box they came in; "how exquisite these are, and like the donor! Oh, yes, I was saying how much I had learned since I had sent out those tickets. I've always had a too-confiding disposition, and, while I'm not now a cynic, I've had eye-openers, plenty of them.

"Going about to different stores, riding windy days, veiled, on the cars, have given me an insight into people's character that has been both painful and profitable; I needn't tell you whom I mean, for I see you know. I'm not a sentimental fool; the only regret is self-contempt that I've been taken in by them so long, but I've never outgrown a girlish pleasure in being liked.

"You had your husband and children, and I never begrudged wives and mothers their happiness, for my life had been a healthy, happy one, and so completely am I a spinster that I believe I was born one; I've never seen the man I have ever imagined I could fancy, but there was one thing I did want."

Mrs. Alden had listened sympathetically; as Miss Letitia paused for breath she ventured to speak.

"What was that, Letitia?"

"You may laugh, Jennie, if you wish, but that was no more nor less than a trousseau!"

"What? Do you mean that——"

"I mean, and I know it will go no further, that I couldn't have a trousseau without a marriage, and that was why I sent out cards. Don't you understand, Jennie? The marriage could not take place—because there was no bridegroom at all; now it's out."

For once Mrs. Alden was surprised beyond the power of expression, but when she did recover, her merry laughter was delightful to hear and was joined by Letitia.

"What a good joke!" gasped Mrs. Jennie. "Wouldn't it make the Richmond dames open their eyes? It shall go no further, though I would like Alyn to know, if you have no objection. What would Mrs. Ponsonby say?"

"Embellish it until we wouldn't know it; but there's one thing she won't enjoy any more—expectations of sharing my fortune. I shall leave my money as a fund for old maids' trousseaux."

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS OF "GOLDEN DWARF."

"It is the body of Sir Christopher Dering!"

The words are spoken by a pretty girl—fair-haired, blue-eyed. She stands, horrified, by a grass-grown ditch in a country lane, out of which a great mastiff is climbing. The ditch contains the corpse of a stalwart man—a handkerchief bound over his mouth and nostrils.

Close to there is a strange figure, graceful, well-dressed, even handsome, but with the stature of a boy and the face of an adult. He carries a heavy dog-whip, and stares, fixedly, at the dead body just discovered by his mastiff, Cerberus.

The girl is Esther Carew; the dwarf, Otto Hare, the richest landowner in Derbyshire, and the mystery of Wyresdale, a village in that county. For the first time in fifteen years he has set foot in a public thoroughfare, to attract the attention of Esther, whom he has watched from his park.

Sir Christopher Dering was alive at seven o'clock the preceding day. He and his nephew, Felix, had quarrelled over the latter's love for Esther. Sir Christopher wanted Felix to make a good marriage—the birth of his little cousin Brian has put him out of the succession to the baronetcy. Felix is faithful to the penniless Esther Carew.

Much turns on the whereabouts of Felix on the night before. It appears that he was in Duchester, some miles off, whither he went on business, and spent a night at the theatre. Could he have killed the squire?

Felix in vain protests his innocence.

But the cloud of suspicion gathers around him. Meantime, the child Brian has been kidnapped, and Felix is suspected of this too. He discovers a riding whip with some peculiar marks upon it.

One day an old sailor named Foley is attacked by Otto Hare's dogs.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Mr. Geddes Dresses a Wound.

"I am sorry I offended you, Miss Connie, but, after all, there's reason in the way I look at it. If Brasher is the man, you are being unjust to me; if Brasher is not the man, you are being cruel to him."

The firm tones of Archibald Geddes trembled a little, but he twisted his thick moustache with a dauntless air, and his brown eyes surveyed reprovingly the flushed countenance of Constance Forester as she stood on the short flight of steps that descended from the parlour to the shop at the end of the counter. The pharmacy was aglow with its half-dozen of incandescent gas-jets—a radiant blot on the cool summer night that shadowed the High Street.

Connie tossed her head—it was a favourite gesture. The Scotchman ignored this sign of wilfulness. Connie bit her lip.

"Mr. Geddes," she murmured, plucking at the neat cuff of her blouse; "you are not a bit kind. As though I hadn't to think of father!"

Geddes frowned. "And I ask, Miss Connie," he retorted, "what I asked the other evening; how far is your anxiety for Mr. Forester to take you? I am aware you don't love the Inspector, but that doesn't guarantee you won't make up your mind to become Mrs. Brasher."

"Oh," cried Constance Forester; "you are horrid, Mr. Geddes. I suppose you mean I could marry someone I didn't care for."

The chemist's assistant put out his hand, clasped the fingers of the indignant speaker and drew her from her elevated position to the shelter of the screen that hid the dispensing-table.

"You've a stout heart and an unselfish spirit, Miss Connie," he said, gazing at her ardently, "and you're afraid Brasher might bring your father into this eternal murder case of his. To protect Mr. Forester by retaining your influence over the Inspector you'd grant him privilege after privilege till he'd have cause to consider you his property before you woke up to your danger."

Connie stifled a sob. "Father and Mr. Brasher were together for quite a while yesterday," she faltered, "and father was in a terrible state when the Inspector went. I—I mustn't offend Mr. Brasher; I daren't—he called to warn me that night, but you'd been so cross with me I wouldn't explain."

"Warn you about what?" inquired Geddes, and coughed to disguise the repentance in his voice.

"About letting father go to the 'Wheatsheaf,'" answered Connie; "he—he will talk so much, and Mr. Brasher says it will get us into trouble. Mr. Brasher owned he had no business to tell me—but—but he said even police-officers had their weaknesses and I was his."

Archibald Geddes whistled. "By jove!" commented the Scotchman; "he's sentimental—a thing I shouldn't have given him credit for. My poor Connie—pardon the liberty, Miss Forester, the word just slipped out, not but what it tasted better without the Miss—I am a brute, and you have a difficult game to play. Yet if—if I could but be certain you liked me a trifle more than Brasher, I would contrive to endure his visits."

Connie blushed to her pretty brows and sought, not too determinedly, to release herself. "Mr. Geddes," she whispered, "please, please, don't be foolish!"

Geddes sighed and dropped the small fingers. "I'm a great ass, that's true!" he muttered.

Constance Forester retreated a few paces and smiled bewitchingly. "How absurd" she said, "to wonder if I care for you more than for the Inspector! I wouldn't object if he never entered the shop again. And I'm sure I'm perpetually out here talking to you. So you must be very stupid or very jealous."

"I—I am!" cried the Scotchman; "I'm jealous of the ground you walk on, the air you breathe. And all the time I know I'm an idiot."

"Then you must be stupid," decided Connie, as she escaped up the adjacent stair; "awfully stupid—for you've no need to be—to be jealous."

Archibald Geddes started—the expression on Connie's bright features made him spring to her; his pulses hammering, and his tongue hugging the roof of his mouth.

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

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"Connie!" he began—and stopped; there was a heavy footfall in the shop behind him. He choked down a sulphurous observation and turned, while Constance Forester darted through the swing door that led to the house.

Propped against the counter and swaying unsteadily, his sunburned visage wan, his hands crimsoned, his throat bound with a rough-spotted bandanna, was Nicholas Foley. At sight of Nicholas he reeled forward and staggered into the recess at the back of the dispensary screen.

"'Souse my running for harbour, messmate," gasped the sailor, "but I'm under a flag of distress, and I thought it was you in charge. I don't savvy a regular doctor—he'd be a heap too curious. But you can caulk this hole and rig a bit of regulation canvas over it, can't you?"

With this nautical preface he unwrapped the bandanna from his neck. Geddes recoiled; Foley's throat was well-nigh hidden by dried blood, his shirt-neck and wisp of tie clotted into a gory mass, and united to his coat-collar.

"A nip from a piratical land-shark of a prowling cur done that," added Nicholas, "set on it was—by a misbegotten imp as I'd pay out if his walls cleared the main-top of a four-master, and had a mongrel to every yard of wall. The brute's teeth missed my weasand and my big pipes, I reckon, or I'd have been a dead 'un by now. The tyke was healthy, so I won't hurt if you stop out the dust."

The Scotchman, studying the sailor in a quiet, characteristic fashion, reached to a glass jar, filled it with water from a tap at his elbow, measured into it a quantity of carbolic acid, and got a sponge out of a drawer.

"I expect you're safe enough," he allowed, "but you ought to get a doctor as soon as possible. However, I'll wash it clean and bandage it."

"Finish the job, messmate," instructed the sailor, "I'm not going to be patched by nobody but you, you settled my malary when I first struck this cursed village, and you'll take a telling about an ill-convenient question. No, fix me up and charge me what's fair."

Thoughtfully Geddes proceeded to do as he was bidden. He sponged off the clotted blood, showing the lacerated wounds on right and left, between the carotid arteries and the pharynx.

"You had a narrow shave," observed the operator.

"I'll bet he fancies me stiff before this," snarled Foley, leaning back in the chair the Scotchman had placed, "he made sure the throat was torn out of me, and strolled away so's I could die at my leisure—the lily-livered ape."

"Connie," he began—and stopped; there was a heavy footfall in the shop behind him.

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"Who—who was the blackguard?" queried Geddes casually.

Nicholas winked. "Keep her large, mate," he advised, as the Scotchman plied the sponge, "that's my affair. Push on with the swabbing."

Geddes shrugged his shoulders, rinsed out the sponge and laid it by. Emptying some colourless fluid into a compounding-glass, he added, by weight, a proportion of a yellow powder and mixed them.

"What's that?" desired the sailor, "smells like grog."

"Collodion," said the chemist's assistant—"gun-cotton dissolved in ether and iodoform. To skin the wounds and help them to heal quickly."

"You're the skipper for my money," remarked Nicholas, "clap it on."

Geddes selected a camel's-hair brush from his stock and painted the lotion over the lacerated surfaces of his client's tanned neck.

"Smarts a trifle," decided Nicholas, "but give me a medicine as grips. Does that finish me?"

"Not yet," answered the Scotchman, "you must be bandaged."

He slipped behind the counter, pulled out a drawer, and selected several rolls of a stout woven material, varying in width. Returning with these, he prepared and applied a couple of scientific wrappings. The sailor rose from his seat a much more comfortable person than he had entered it.

"And the price?" said Nicholas briefly, resuming his coat.

"Three and six," answered Geddes, with equal curtness.

His customer thanked him, paid, and strode to the exit, but only to halt and recross to the counter.

"Give me a hail in the morning," he said, "I'll go on the sick list for a day or two and mine's a lonely tack. And, harkee, you can bring me a doctor, Dr. Joseph Kraft, the Dutch beggar, at Mr.—Otto—Hare's."

He lent the Golden Dwarf's name a tremendous but peculiar emphasis.

"Come along with him to-morrow," pursued Foley, as he filled and lighted his briar; "be certain to come with him, messmate. Drop round about eight bells of the first dog-watch—four o'clock in the afternoon."

The sailor lowered his harsh bass to a confidential undertone.

"If you weren't there," he admitted, "I'd as lief not see him. As for the doctor, he'll toddle round when he knows who's in the sick bay—oh, yes, he make all sail for my moorings, you bet."

And with a complicated twitch of his mahogany visage, Nicholas lurched out of the Wyresdale Pharmacy.

Archibald Geddes began to dispose of his apparatus. He was absorbed by a multitude of singular reflections.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Your Mother Confides You to Me."

"Well, any news of the fool? Don't grin at me in that confounded fashion, but come to the point. Is he dead or alive?"

Joseph Kraft laid his soft straw hat upon the writing-table in his private room at Wyresdale Park, set down near the cage of tropical birds, and contemplated the fretful pose of the Golden Dwarf. Otto Hare wore a frock coat of dark grey, and a gleaming silk. In the costume he looked more like a miniature than ever.

"My dear Hare," said the German; "you were once puzzled to decide if I were your familiar demon or your fairy godfather. You seem unable to dispense with me in either role."

Otto Hare winced. "Have your say out," he retorted, as he flung himself into the leather-covered lounge hard by; "yet please recollect that my guests will be missing me, and that I must get back to the garden."

Kraft surveyed his patron with a bland tolerance. "So far," said the German, "there is no word of Foley. If he is in his cottage, he refuses to answer, or is incapable of doing it, for I called at the wretched place about noon. I have since communicated with the police, not, of course, telling them we know who is the victim. But our conduct must be scrupulous to a degree, or we shall suffer for it."

"You will allow them to poke about *there!*" gasped the Golden Dwarf.

"They can overhaul the locality to their heart's content," responded Kraft; "there is nothing to suggest that the occurrence was other than an unfortunate accident. As a matter of fact, the fellow was hot on a dangerous scent, but I have rendered all safe, and, with a snare or two artistically disposed at the spot, it will seem as if Foley had been attacked when exercising the privilege you were imprudent enough to grant him. Still, if he is killed, and a coroner should cross-examine you, my poor friend, you may be much worried."

"I'll take my chance of that," answered Otto Hare; "in my case, I trust I have revenged Cerberus."

Joseph Kraft pushed a huge finger at the bars of the neighbouring cage and chirruped to his favourites.

"You are an odd person, Hare," he decided; "for the sake of a defunct mongrel you jeopardise—what do you not jeopardise; yourself, myself, the work of two years. I confess to you, when I discovered that crimson trail last night, and ascertained to what it led, I had thoughts of taking to my heels as I was. But a certain native courage prevented me, as you know."

The German faced about and linked his hands behind his back. "To be frank," he added, "your vindictiveness has not served us badly. Had Foley completed his—his terrestrial explorations, the worst might have happened. Yet it would have been cleverer to see that the job was thoroughly done."

"I haven't your cold blood, Kraft," said the Golden Dwarf, rising; "we must hope the work finished itself. Are you coming down to be agreeable? The snobs of half a county are collected on my lawn; you should not miss studying them."

Kraft settled to his writing-table, in his plump fingers a fat note-book he had produced from a safe between the windows of the apartment.

"I want to make some memoranda," he explained; "by the way, you are doing as I recommended and showing them round the——"

Hare paused irresolutely. "Is it as wise as you imagine it to be?" he queried. His small hands fidgeted with a jewelled repeater; the costly timepiece struck the second quarter after four—a faint, musical chime.

"It would be madness to neglect the chance," asserted the German; "they believe you to be an enigma and the possessor of enigmas. You must teach them to circulate commonplace explanations of your secrets. I am positive any other plan would be sheer idiocy. You would choose to open Wyresdale Park to the vulgar herd. You can but balance recklessness by audacity."

The Golden Dwarf flicked the dust from his patent-leather boots. "As you will," was his answer, and pushing the door ajar, he stepped through it. A glance backward showed him that the German had commenced to scribble—long lines of a firm black cipher fell from his pen as it travelled over the pages of the note-book. With a petulant gesture, Otto Hare went on downstairs into the sunshine and sweet air of the great lawns which girdled his splendid mansion.

Disrespectfully as he had spoken of them, the Golden Dwarf had prepared a royal reception for the guests at the garden-party, in connection with which Mrs. Carew's services had been requisitioned. A blue and white marquee fluttered its scalloped canvas just before the house; there was the usual bevy of nondescript seats about it—garden chairs, wicker lounges, and bamboo settees, screened by fixed umbrellas, like vast mushrooms.

Round these hovered a little throng of smartly-dressed women and politely bored men, engaged in the consumption of ices, exotic fruits and French sweetmeats, with champagne and claret "cups" in delicate glass, or tea and coffee in egg-shell china.

Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

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In sight of the classic portico, under which the Golden Dwarf stood, an artificial lake spread out a picturesque sheet of water, and on it there plied luxurious barges, rowed by attendants in livery and freighted by trim figures in summer toilettes, or weary masculine forms in scrupulously correct attire. The music of a Hungarian band floated towards Otto Hare from an unseen angle of the lawn; it was playing a melodious Strauss waltz. He hummed the romantic theme as he took stock of his unconscious visitors.

Suddenly his gaze rested upon the object of his search—the figure of Esther Carew, slender, graceful, shy, in a sweeping gown of tucked and snowy chiffon. Her fair tresses were coiled high on her head, beneath a big white hat—all white tulle and blush roses. But her blue eyes were downcast, her sensitive mouth grave and tremulous. She comprehended but too well the significance of the glances that played about her; she was on exhibition to half a county as the probable wife of Otto Hare, the famous Golden Dwarf, the lord of Wyresdale Park and seventy thousand a year.

Otto Hare regarded the despondent expression of her young countenance for a moment or two. Then he crossed the yielding turf to her side.

"I trust, Miss Carew," he observed softly, "you are finding your afternoon in my domains a pleasant one?"

Esther shivered. The sound of his voice, thin and rather harsh, never failed to produce in her a spasm of revulsion.

"It is very beautiful, Mr. Hare," she answered, studying the rich prospect presented by the fine mansion, with its double terrace, symmetrical wings, and lush green frame of lawns and woodlands.

"I am glad you feel it so," murmured her companion, "and now, will you allow me to give you the first glimpse at something not exactly beautiful, but interesting. I told you when we met in the road that I had seen you from my watch-tower. Dr. Kraft has advised me to throw it open today; let me take you to it? Stay, I will ask your mother's permission to carry you off."

He stepped over the sward towards the active form of Mrs. Carew, who, clad in purple and black lace, was discharging her function of hostess with much diplomacy. Returning, an ill-disguised but well-bred sneer on his handsome face—for he read the ambitious widow like a book—the Golden Dwarf bowed in his graceful, foreign style.

"Your mother confides you to me, Miss Carew," he said; "I assure you I appreciate the compliment."

He moved on in the direction of the plantations at the right of the house. Reluctantly, Esther walked by him.

"Some people, I daresay," declared her escort, "have heard of my watch-tower. No doubt it is regarded as one of my mysteries. You will find the explanation of its enigma quite simple."

The sentences were casual enough, yet they seemed to be spoken with an odd amount of hesitation and anxiety. Otto Hare had interlaced his small fingers and was striding along beside the figure in the white frock. Soon there sprang to view, above a copse of low shrubs, the rounded hill, supporting, on a green slope, the fort-like structure and its taller appendage.

The Golden Dwarf did not approach the squat portal in the base of the tower, but led the way up an inclined plane of concrete to a much larger and more pretentious entrance.

This he unlocked, and, leaving it wide, as if to afford admission to any wandering member of the garden-party, motioned Esther to pass in.

She obeyed, and threading a narrow corridor and a second entrance, discovered herself under the lofty, dome-shaped roof of the tower. In the curious tapering erection there was swung, from a powerful cross-bar and girders, a huge telescope.

"You see," said Otto Hare, with a shrill, awkward laugh, "my watch-tower is nothing but an observatory. To prove the instrument genuine I will venture to show you the sun—the orb of day is hardly so fascinating as the moon, but no other object is visible at four o'clock in summer. Zorn!"

At the call a man of middle age, lean and stooping, advanced to them with a noiseless tread. His complexion was ashen-grey, his pupils dull and yet alert, his stiff hair, diversified by silver threads, was cut brush-fashion, and rose rigidly from his skull.

Prefixing an apology to Esther, the Golden Dwarf addressed the new-comer in German. He answered by a shrewd nod and a quiet salutation. Reaching to a couple of pivoted wheels, he began to adjust the great tube and the sliding roof.

This proceeding finished, Otto Hare stooped to peer through the eye-piece. Esther watched him languidly.

Suddenly she started and glanced about her. A look of amazement sprang into her face, and she strained every sense in an acute attention. An unlikely—it seemed, in that place, an impossible!—sound had fallen upon her ears.

CHAPTER XXX.

Inspector Brasher is Surprised.

"Professor Kraft, sir? I fancy he is in the garden with Mr. Hare, but I'll make sure."

"Thank you," said Archibald Geddes, and stepped into the ornate reception hall of Wyresdale Park. It was the first time the Scotchman had entered so magnificent a private dwelling. Pillars of yellow marble flanked the door-way and carried the splendid staircase, covered with inch-thick Afghan carpet, worthy of a palace.

A great window, filled by curiously-frosted glass, lighted the hall and sent long rays of afternoon sunshine to rest on huge rainbow vases and pieces of exquisite bronze. Swinging-lamps of verd-antique depended from finely-wrought brackets of metal—electric, by their sealed globes and delicate cords.

The chemist's assistant followed the liveried attendant into a small ante-chamber, no less princely in its treatment than the hall without. Here he was left alone. Costly rugs—to relieve the polished parquetry under foot—antique but luxurious furniture, rare pictures, and unique curios surrounded the observant Geddes. At length a sharp inspiration escaped his lips.

"No wonder Mr. Hare is called the Golden Dwarf," muttered the critic; "a king might be proud of a house like this."

As he spoke the words a vague impulse made the Scotchman turn—Joseph Kraft had stepped noiselessly into the apartment—his saffron pupils gleaming behind his spectacles, his perpetual smile upon his thin mouth.

"Well, my dear Mr. Geddes," he murmured, "and what can I do for you?"

Archibald Geddes coughed. "I ought to apologise, Professor," said the Scotchman, "for calling you away from the festivities I notice are in progress."

"Not at all, not at all," answered Kraft, with smooth politeness; "I was at work in my room—I do not take kindly to social pleasures. But I am quite at your service, Mr. Geddes."

Geddes acknowledged the compliment. "I am much obliged," he conceded; "but it isn't myself I represent. I have come on behalf of an odd acquaintance of mine, one Foley, who has been injured—by the bite of a dog."

The glances of both Kraft and Geddes met, but neither flinched. Yet the deep-seated glow in the former's glittering orbs seemed to brighten and scintillate.

"He called at our shop last night," went on the Scotchman, "much lacerated about the throat, but with none of the principal arteries cut. I bandaged him, providing against septic inflammation, and advised him to consult a doctor. He replied by a request to bring you round this afternoon—he was sure you would accede to his wish for a visit when you learned who your patient was."

Joseph Kraft nodded, his air heavily sympathetic. "The poor fellow was right," he said; "I met him years ago and found him a rough diamond. I will see him by all means, in—in an hour or two."

Geddes twisted his moustache. "Foley expressed a desire that I should accompany you, Professor," he observed—"I believe I promised to do so."

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The figure of Nicholas Foley lay prone upon the floor motionless.

The German looked down over the lenses of the glittering spectacles he wore, and his brows twitched. "In that case," he decided, "we will go there at once, to save your time, Mr. Geddes—the shop will need you, no doubt. Allow me just to get my hat."

He smiled amiably, withdrew, and mounted the great stair to the storey where was situated his private room. Sitting at his table, he wrote a short prescription, folded, and laid it by. Then he stalked to his safe, and produced, from an inner drawer, a sealed coffer of some foreign wood. Out of it he lifted a rude earthenware pot, containing a whitish paste.

With the tip of a chemical spoon he took a pellet of the paste, dropped it into a small phial, and poured half a dozen drops of water on it. The pellet dissolved, and the fluid became clear. The German washed the spoon, restored the pot and the wooden casket to their place, and secreted the phial in a pocket of his vest. Satisfied with this procedure, he picked up the prescription he had written, locked his room, and descended to the chamber where Archibald Geddes awaited him.

Together they walked out, traversed a corner of the lawn towards the head of the avenue, and strolled down it to the drowsy lane which opened on to the cross-roads almost opposite the by-way on whose grassy margin was perched the ruinous cottage of Nicholas Foley.

At this point Joseph Kraft paused, and brought out the slip of paper he had fetched from his room.

"I know something of Foley's constitution," said the German, "he was subject to malaria when we encountered years back. That must be taken count of. You might get this made up and join me at his place."

Geddes frowned. "I think I told you, Professor," he demurred, "that I promised Foley I'd accompany you. He appeared, if I may be so frank, to entertain a sort of reluctance to interview you without a witness."

Kraft indulged in a humorous grimace. "Doubtless," he said, "the poor fellow has lost too much blood and was fanciful. But I respect your fidelity to an agreement, Mr. Geddes. We will go to Master Foley by the High Street, and I will remain at the shop till you have compounded my prescription."

The chemist's assistant fell in with the proposition, and in silence the couple gained the threshold of the Wyresdale Pharmacy. Archibald Geddes strode to his dispensary corner—a few moments later he had put up the required mixture—in a ten-ounce bottle of the usual type.

Carrying it himself, he joined the stalwart form of the Professor, and they completed the journey to the roadside cottage.

Geddes knocked at the tarred plank entrance and observed, a second afterwards, that a dingy print curtain at one of the casements stirred—the sailor was on his guard, no doubt

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against a visit from the German alone. Soon the latch clicked, and Nicholas Foley, clad in a blue bedgown, stood before them. He saluted with a grin.

"Half-speed ahead and starboard your helm," he adjured them, retreating to a cramped sleeping-chamber. They acted on his instructions and found themselves entering an apartment in which was slung a canvas hammock. On the slack of this maritime couch the sailor took his seat, motioning his guests to a bench by the wall.

"Heard about my—my accident, Doctor?" he queried; "I was sure you'd want to look me up. Not that I needed you to caulk the leak I sprung, my friend there has done as much for me. But I'm wondering about what'll become of me, not being able to do odd jobs in the village for an honest living. I think I ought to bring an action against the lubber whose tyke fouled me. What do you say, Doctor; I set a lot of store by your opinion."

A hypocritical whine stole into his voice—it arrested Geddes' attention by its palpable hypocrisy. The chemist's assistant studied the two; Kraft preserved his amiable expression, but there were beads of moisture on his pink brow and cheeks. Nicholas Foley was radiant with suppressed malice. The Scotchman felt that some mysterious duel was in progress under his eyes.

"It occurred locally then?" asked Kraft, putting his plump finger-tips together.

Foley assented. "Close to your show," he said, rubbing an unshaven jaw. Kraft affected to consider the matter.

"I should approach him for compensation," agreed the German; "but not in a hostile spirit."

"Think I'd get decent treatment?" pursued the sailor. "He'd have to fight me if he didn't. Some Duchester lawyer might help me with the case, when I'd had a chance to explain what a dashed queer case it was."

"I should have recourse to personal negotiations first," said Joseph Kraft, biting his nails; "I would lend you all possible assistance, and—and mention your difficulty to Mr. Hare—he is rich and has, in addition, local influence."

"Right you are," cried Nicholas, as he rolled into his hammock; "it's a bargain—hullo, matey, what's that?" He was looking at the bottle held by Archibald Geddes.

"A mixture Professor Kraft advises," said the chemist's assistant.

"I gave Mr. Geddes a trifling prescription," added the German, "which he made up and brought. You will require a little care if you are not to be troubled by the bite Mr. Geddes has bandaged so cleverly."

The sailor made a motion to the package. "Put it up yourself at the shop?" he demanded.

Geddes answered in the affirmative. "You'll be none the worse for it, if I may offer an opinion," said the Scotchman.

Kraft took the bottle, stripped the wrapping, uncorked it clumsily, and tasted the contents on his thumb. "It wouldn't hurt a baby," he announced; "and it's rather pleasant than otherwise. Here, Mr. Geddes, give him a dose."

He turned away, smiling, and Archibald Geddes obeyed the request. The chemist's assistant did not see that he was pocketing a minute phial—empty. When that phial had been brought from Wyresdale Park it had been full.

"*Au revoir*," said Joseph Kraft, as he stepped towards the threshold of the cottage; "I will look you up in a day or two, and we can discuss your prospects of compensation, Foley. Meanwhile, consider yourself under my care. To our next meeting, Mr. Geddes."

With this farewell the German parted; the saffron pupils behind his spectacles twinkled keenly—he might almost have been amused.

The sailor chuckled. "Much obliged to you, Mr. Geddes," he observed; "since that's your name—you've saved me handsome, and I'm your humble for it. Stay and have some grog."

Geddes dissented. "I must get back to the shop," was his objection. "I'll run round this evening for a chat. But I can't stop now."

Foley composed himself to sleep. "You'll be welcome," he responded; "and I'll pass the time in a snooze. When do I tipple some more of that medicine?"

"In a couple of hours," said the Scotchman, donning his hat; "expect me about ten o'clock—I suppose you're not short of grub?"

"Not much," Nicholas assured him; "barrin' it pains me a bit to eat. Don't miss your watch at the shop for me—I'm O.K."

He waved a brown hand, and Archibald Geddes left him. Foley got out of his hammock and closed the shutter at the casement—the slant beams of the westering sun annoyed him.

Some while after the Scotchman had hastened down the lane, a woman approached the wicket of the cottage and passed up the walk. Her dark hair, proud features, and smart dress were those of Judith Garland.

She raised the latch, found the door unfastened, and walked in. The kitchen was not tenanted, she peeped at the bedroom. The powerful form of the sailor, his blanket thrown to the floor, tossed in his hammock. He sat up suddenly, blinking at her.

Judith entered. "You will be surprised to see me, Mr. Foley," she began, "but I wanted to speak to you privately—about—about Mr. Dering and my brother."

Foley nodded—a dazed, uncertain gesture, as though the words she used were familiar enough but imperfectly comprehended. His visitor drew nearer.

"You arranged with my brother," she said, "to keep silence on the matter of Mr. Dering's presence in Wyresdale the night of his uncle's death. Well," she added, with a restrained excitement, "I wish you to speak out, do you hear?—to speak out and ruin him. I will give you five pounds to go to Inspector Brasher and say all you know. You won't betray me, of course, or Neal, but be sure you convince him about Mr. Dering. Be cautious and crafty, and you need say very little."

Foley slipped to the floor, showing his teeth in a horrible grin, just as Judith, her eager adjuration completed, produced from her purse a crisp new five-pound note.

"Kraft," he cried, snatching at half of a suggestive word in her sentence; "Kraft! Yes, you Dutch beggar, what have you got in them boxes? I see you moseying about the forehold last night; it was my watch on deck. Be reasonable, you fool, and I won't split."

Judith sprang to the door of the bedroom, alarmed by his demeanour. He made a vicious dash at her.

"Come from Kraft, do you?" he yelled, with a rapid change in his delirium. "Then make all sail back and tell him he's to pay up double. Think I'll be gnawed cheap by his infernal imp's mongrels? Not by a durned sight—not for every Kraft in Christendom! Pay, you Dutch swab, pay!"

The sailor's speech ceased abruptly, and he gasped, clutching at his throat.

Terrified, Judith darted from the apartment and fled, by way of the meadows and the adjacent footpath, in the direction of Dering House. Her plan to avenge herself upon Felix Dering had encountered a strange and unexpected check.

Had she glanced back when she reached the knoll at the top of the footpath, she would have perceived the tall outline of Inspector Brasher—far off, yet deliberately approaching the cottage she had left in so precipitate a fashion.

Some minutes later, Michael Brasher threaded the garden walk and knocked at the plank door. It swung before him, and the Inspector mounted the step. As Judith had done, he peered into the kitchen, then into the sleeping-chamber.

An exclamation broke from him—the figure of Nicholas Foley lay prone upon the floor, contorted yet motionless. Mr. Brasher hurried to lean over it. The sailor was warm, but no breath stirred his deep chest—death had seized him in an almost frightfully sudden grasp.

A footfall on the threshold of the chamber made the Inspector face about. The new arrival was Felix Dering!

(*To be continued.*)

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

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John Gile, Monomaniac.

By SCOTT L. LITCHFIELD.

THE incident I am about to relate came to my knowledge when I was first taken on as a partner in the then flourishing law firm of Routledge, Kerr and Co. Since that time the then once great firm has outlived its prosperity, and has been pushed into the background by younger and more enterprising houses.

We had offices in Leadenhall Street, in a tall, gaunt old building, whose windows looked out on the busy street with a stare of superiority. Long, dusty rooms and sparsely furnished offices presented an uninviting aspect to those who had no particular business with us; but we were of considerable importance in those days, and our pigeon-holes were stuffed full of the secrets of people of quality.

Mr. Routledge had been very good to me, and partly to my attention to business and partly to his indulgence, I owed my advancement until at last I was acknowledged as one on the firm.

John Gile had long been a client of Routledge Kerr and Co., and we younger ones knew much about him, from the stories which went through the office.

John Gile was the son of an enormously wealthy manufacturer of Leeds. He had been educated to that extent which wealth can educate, and at last had inherited his father's enormous fortune. His education, like that of the majority of wealthy men's only sons, had not been in any particular direction, and he had grown up as he chose, imbibing that which pleased him best, until at last, now that he was a middle-aged man, whose "future" was already on the wane, he had earned the nickname of "monomaniac," on account of certain idiosyncrasies which I shall describe later. He had been a wanderer, long years elapsing between the short scraps of news which would come from him—now in Egypt, now in India or Australia, or from some equally far-away foreign country. Sometimes queries were made concerning his whereabouts, but not often, for he had few acquaintances, and no friends apparently, unless the firm could be called his friend. He had been here and there, but mostly in places famous for their artistic past and the examples of unexcelled art which still existed in them—some of it placed on exhibition for the benefit of everyone, and some of it buried in the country villages undiscovered by the connoisseur. For John Gile was a collector, a searcher, a finder, and a buyer all in one. Those who knew him said his opinions on matters of artistic merit were second to none, and spoke of his own private collection in tones of awe, as something of great value and beauty. He was, in short, a peculiar old man, whose heart was cold with the frost of years, and whose mind was wrapped up in admiration of his own hobby. He collected all sorts of rare and beautiful things, but cameos were his idols. Let him hear of a rare or curious specimen, be it ever so far away, and he was never at peace until he held it in his hand; and if it was a gem, never satisfied until he could call it his own. The history of cameos was to him as the A B C is to a schoolboy, and when the cockles of his heart were warm he would discourse learnedly on the beautiful tints of this specimen or the delicate workmanship of that. It was he who purchased at a fabulous price a part of the famous Gonzaga collection, and it was said his home in Warwickshire was a veritable museum of art; so you may imagine my satisfaction when one morning Mr. Routledge called me into his private office and said:

"Mr. Burgoyne, there are some matters of importance concerning the property of John Gile on which we must have his opinion immediately; and as he has at last returned to his home, for good I hope, Mr. Kerr, I think it would be best for you to run down and see him about it."

"All right, sir," I said, and immediately made myself ready for the long journey. As the business which brought about my acquaintance with John Gile does not in any respect concern this story, I will not enlarge upon it. Suffice it to say, after a long and tiresome journey, covered with dust and wearied by the jolting of the cars, and the jostling of the crowd, I arrived at the little town of M——. I procured a conveyance, and in the dusk of a late October afternoon was driven to the door of Gile's house.

The house, viewed from the outside, was an unpretentious affair, and gave little evidence of the wealth of the occupant; a low, rambling old structure, betokening some age, and composed of all sorts of architecture, ancient and modern, and covered at the front by creeping vines whose leaves had begun to change in colour as the evenings of autumn had crept upon them. I made my way up to the massive door, and, ringing the bell, stood waiting upon the stoop. A motherly-looking sub-

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stantial woman, who afterwards proved to be the housekeeper, opened the door, and upon reading my card, said:

"Oh, yes, Mr. Burgoyne, Mr. Gile is expecting you, and has given orders that you should be shown to you room immediately. We dine in half an hour."

And bustling along before me she led the way up a broad carven flight of stairs to a wide and spacious chamber, and leaving me with a cheery admonition that dinner would be served shortly, hurried away to attend to her household duties. Finishing my toilet, I made the best of my way to the lower floor, and opening a door on the right of the hallway, found myself in a lofty room, the walls of which were covered with pictures and the niches and corners were filled with cabinets and bits of statuary. Before a blazing fire on one side of the room sat the man whose personality we at the office had often wondered over. He glanced up at my entrance, and, rising, advanced to meet me. John Gile had been a handsome man, and the inroads of age had not sufficed to eliminate all the attractions from his person. A clear, dark eye, a firm mouth, and the wide and heavy nose so common to lovers of art, were the most prominent features. He greeted me cordially.

"Mr. Burgoyne, I am pleased that Routledge, Kerr and Co. have respected my inclination for agreeable people, and sent you to see me."

He said this with so much earnestness that I was forced to believe that he meant what he said.

We dined, and after dinner, at which he proved a most agreeable and entertaining companion, we went back to the big room in which I had first met him. We lighted our pipes, and settled ourselves before the blazing fire, when he said

"Judging from your conversation at dinner, I should say you are a man who is somewhat interested in matters of art, and know something about them."

Thanking him for the implied compliment I acquiesced.

"If that is the case," he continued, "I will show you some of my cameos."

At the voicing of the word his whole manner changed: he enthused from the plain commonplace man of travel to a devotee of a goddess whose worship always is complete,

"Mr. Gile," I said, "I shall consider myself extremely favoured if I may see even a part of the famous collection I have heard so much about, for I am, as you have guessed, an ardent though uneducated admirer of the beautiful."

"Say no more," he returned; "I shall be delighted to show you my treasures."

Reaching a little steel-bound chest from the table which stood at his elbow, he opened it with a key of intricate workmanship, and commenced to lay out tray after tray of unique and wonderful gems. Onyx and pietra dura, lapis luzuli and shell, the sardonyx red of the Bull's Mouth, and the delicate pink of the Queen's Conch, exquisite and varied in detail and beauty.

"This," he said, "is an excellent Saolini, the lines of which are finer than a hair." He laid it down, and, picking up another, continued: "And here we have a Girometti of the first water, while this Giovanni Dies, with its wonderful colouring, is especially worthy of notice."

"I suppose you have your favourite, Mr. Gile?" I questioned.

His eyes lit up as he said:

"Oh, yes, to be sure, and I will show it to you;" and reaching carefully into the bottommost tray, he drew forth a specimen, the possession of which I envy him to this day. It was of Chaldean onyx, the background of a heavy delft blue, and the upper strata of pure and creamy white. The stone itself was a gem, but the carving—oh! the carving!—shall I ever forget it?

A face of power, infinite, yet hampered by a touch of sensuality, looked out at me from the delicate sculpture; clear cut, and every linament standing out in an individuality whose likeness I had never witnessed. Oh! the beauty, the strength of it, and such a little thing, scarce an inch in diameter, and half as much in thickness, yet all the passions and ambitions of human life gathered together within its outlines.

I sighed as I handed it back to the man who, all the time I had held it, had watched me with jealousy in his every expression.

"You are fortunate," I said; "it must have cost you an enormous sum."

"Well," he said, "it cost me these," and he held up his right hand, which was minus the first and second fingers. I suppose my face expressed my curiosity, for he said:

"I see you are interested, and if you care to hear how I came by this stone, I will tell you the story.

"In the year 1855, shortly after the death of Belline, il Passatore, who had been the scourge of Naples for years, his wife, Ysa, a most remarkable woman, by the way, had been driven into Sicily; there, at the head of a band of Cammora, which had degenerated into a herd of bloodthirsty banditti, she was terrorising the city of Syracuse and its environs. I happened to be in that locality, searching as usual for what could be found in the way of cameos.

"Sicily, you know, is the home of shell work, and some of my most beautiful and valued specimens I have come across in the cabins of the country folk of that beautiful country. No doubt my name and condition were well known to the people thereabout, although I was not aware of the fact.

"One afternoon my landlady came to me as I sat beneath the great lime tree in the courtyard, and, bowing low, said:

"'A gentleman to see you, Excellency.'

"'Who is he?' I asked.

"For answer she handed me a card on which was written, 'Guiseppe Felozzi.'

"'Show him in,' I said.

"The woman bowed, withdrew, and shortly returned, ushering in a tall, dark stranger, whose attire convinced me he was a man of the world. His face was Italian, his eyes black as sloes, the eyebrows meeting above, and his speech suave and correct.

"Saluting me, he said:

"'Signor Gile, I have heard of your penchant for old-time gems, as who has not, and have that to tell which may prove of interest to you.'

"He said it so nicely, I was convinced of his good-nature, and asked him to sit down and smoke. This he did, and after lighting his cigarette, which he preferred to roll himself after the usual Italian fashion, he said:

"'I am an admirer of these beautiful things myself, but alas! my means are not equal to my desires, so——' and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

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"'There is a certain signora,' said my visitor, 'living in the suburb of L——, the sole surviving member of a once powerful family, who has been reduced to the disposal of her personal jewels. This delicate task she has confided to me as a trusted friend. Among the jewels is an onyx of Chaldea, carved by the hand of Meldhor, the Babylonian, bearing the head of Baaltis. This treasure came into her possession through a long line of succession dating from the time of the Medici, whose people brought it from Egypt. It is superb, it is unique, *magnifique!* Alas! that I may not own it myself; but my entire possessions are not one half of its value, so, signor, I offer you this opportunity.'

"I did not hesitate. Madmanlike, I leaped to my feet and breathlessly said: 'Let us go to it. Come, show me the way.'

"The Italian smiled.

"'You are enthusiastic, signor; but come, it is not so far.'

"He arose, and leading the way, we passed through the house. In the hall I picked up a blackthorn which I carried more from habit than from need.

"Conversing pleasantly, Signor Felozzi led the way up out of the village into the hills which surround it; but I must have proved a sorry companion, for my mind was full of the wonder which I was to see; yet I had time to think, as we left the town, that Thomas Hurd, the only man I know in all Europe, was expected to arrive in Syracuse that afternoon, and I should not be there to receive him. But that did not bear a penny-weight against the fact that I was to see the dream of my lifetime—a genuine Babylonian cameo—and besides I would return shortly.

"For an hour we journeyed, and I was beginning to be impatient when my conductor said:

"'Ah! we have arrived,' and almost before I was aware we had turned a corner, and, standing in a cleft of the hill I perceived a substantial house, whose portals were open, but which seemed to be deserted. It had evidently been a villa of some importance in its time, for over the door was emblazoned a coat of arms, though time and countless storms had nearly obliterated it. We reached the threshold.

"'Enter,' said Felozzi.

"I stepped through the doorway, and found myself in a hall of goodly dimensions. The door closed behind me and Felozzi stepping in front of me, said:

"'Signor, you were an easy victim!'

"Like a flash the memory of Ysa and her band of robbers swept through my mind, and I realised that I had been trapped. Feeling that resistance was hopeless, for Guiseppe had already placed a silver whistle to his lips, and had blown a summons to his minions, still, I backed up against the wall, and holding my cudgel at *tiercel*, awaited developments. There was a sound of opening doors, and a hurry a feet, and I was surrounded by a crowd of dark-browed ruffians, each carrying in his belt a weapon of some sort.

"'Signor,' said Felozzi, 'do not be foolish. Submit quietly, and no harm shall come to you.'

"'I believed you once and I will not again. You are a liar, Guiseppe!' I cried, lost in a fury of rage.

"His face darkened, and the sinister brows contracted until his face was wrinkled and distraught.

"'Seize him, Antinne!' he cried, 'here you, Luigi, Bartholomew, quick, disarm him, that he may no longer taunt you.'

"They rushed, and I met them (I had learned the quarter-staff at Rugby), point down, then, with a quick one, two, three, so many of them sprawled on the paved floor.

"That made them ugly, and those still standing drew long wicked knives at their belts and rushed again. I guess it would have fared badly with me if something hadn't happened which, so far as I was concerned, was entirely unexpected. I had my back against the wall, my club aloft, the ruffians grouped about me looking for an opening. Guiseppe was crying them on, and things looked bad for me, when a side door was thrown open, and a tall woman with flowing hair rushed into the hall with a two-handed sword in her hands. She came to a full stop when her eyes fell on us, and cried:

"'Guiseppe, what means this? Must I be forced to take the brand to preserve quiet about my own apartments? Get thee hence!'

"No answer, no movement!

"Quick as a thought the great sword went up. I would not have thought that she could do it, and darting forward, she brought it down upon the outstretched arm of the foremost bandit, so that his severed arm fell with a thud to the pavement, and the man stood a full minute before he spun round and dropped beside his arm.

"Again the sword went up, but I stood alone before her, for all the rest had vanished; then I said a hasty prayer, for I thought my time had come, I having no chance with so formidable a weapon.

"'Who are you to disturb me, Ysa Cammorista?' and not waiting for an answer, down came the mighty blade; but I leaped aside, and the sword, catching on my blackthorn, shore it into two pieces.

"'Now,' said I, 'is the time,' but she did not strike again. Looking up at her I saw her mood had changed.

"'Follow me,' she said; and turning her back to me, she went through the still open doorway. Meekly I obeyed.

"She was still walking away from me when I entered the door behind her, and did not pause until she had returned the sword to its place on the wall whence she had snatched it in her fury; then, seating herself in an immense carved chair, at the farther end of the room, she gazed at me where I stood by the door.

"She beckoned to me and I advanced; but the room was a long one, and before I stood at the foot of the throne I had a chance to scrutinise this strange woman. She was beautiful beyond a doubt—I, as a connoisseur in art, felt sure of it—but—there was no soul in her face; her eyes looked forth from their portals speculatively calm, notwithstanding the outbreak of a moment since.

"'John Gile,' she said, 'you were very near to death, do you know it?'

"I bowed.

"'Ransom, John Gile, ransom,' she continued. 'What say you? Ten thousand pounds is the figure, and perchance your friends neglect to send it, so then will I send them a remembrance of you in the shape of an ear, a nose, or a finger.'

"I stared; I had not anticipated anything like that.

"You called Guiseppe a liar. You did him an injustice, signor, for that which he told you is true; and neither am I a liar, as you will find. See, here is the gem,' and loosening her bodice, she drew forth and handed me the cameo, still warm with its contact with her bosom.

"Guiseppe had not lied; and I could have clasped him

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to my bosom in thankfulness, evil plight as I was in, at the sight out. I fondled it, I caressed it; I carried it to my lips, little dreaming its evil secret, while that inexorable woman gazed at me, a smile of scorn at my enthusiasm wreathing her lips.

"'And yet,' she said, 'if your friends prove faithful, and send your ransom, then will I give it to you!'

"I stood in amazement. Who could have imagined such a proposition? Ten thousand pounds! The Baaltis cameo! What could I do?

"'I will tell you what I will do. I will write a note to Thomas Hurd, Syracuse. He surely must have arrived. I will tell him to send the money. The paltry money! How can it compare with so priceless a treasure?'

"I did it. They locked me in a strong-walled room where I had nought to do but feed my mind on the memory of that one look at the beautiful gem. I waited a week. No word from Syracuse! I waited another week. Still no word. What could it mean?

"Then they cut off the index finger of my right hand," he held up his hand, "and sent it to the city.

"Gods above! how I longed to get at the cowardly curs; but in their superiority of numbers they held me over the block while the butcher did his work. Another week, and silence; then they took the next finger and sent it. Curses on them! The power which strengthens man in times of adversity alone knows how I endured it! And still the time fled by, and the third week was almost at an end, when one night—it rained that night in Sicily—I heard my door unlocked, and, rising from my couch in the corner, stood face to face with Ysa. Her beautiful figure was draped in black, and she held her light aloft; her features were troubled, I thought. That thought maybe the indulgence which comes from the contemplation of beauty. Be it as it may, she stood before me, and around her neck was the chain which held my idol.

"'Signor Gile,' she said, 'another week is almost gone, and as we have had no word from your friend, it marks the loping off of another of your members. Still, I am much inclined to save you this further humiliation. How easy for me to give you freedom! My heart has been touched by your courage and fortitude. Will you accept freedom, and pledge your word to secrecy concerning my whereabouts? Will you?'

"Freedom was before me.

"'Let me look at the cameo, Cammorista.' Quietly she drew out the bauble, and as its beauty broke upon my vision, its glorious workmanship, its subtle lines, its exquisite colours, my mind was made up

"Signor Gile, I have heard of your penchant for old time gems."

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

"'May I take the cameo, Ysa Cammorista?' I asked boldly, for I felt she was in a gentle mood, and perhaps might sell it to me. For a moment she gazed at me, and then came her answer:

"'Nay!'

"'Then I will wait,' I said quietly.

"'Thou art a fool!' she said, 'and still it is well worth waiting for a long time.' She held it close to her eyes, turning it over and over in her hand, when suddenly she exclaimed:

"'Corpo di Bacco! What is this?' I looked up, but none too quick to see the terrible thing which followed.

"As she held it close before her face she touched the delicate spring which old Melchior had concealed so cleverly among its dainty convolutions, hundreds of years before, the head of Baaltis flew back, a red consuming flame poured forth; she uttered a hideous cry, and clutching her eyes fell to the floor. The room was filled with phosphoric fumes, the atmosphere was horrible. I groped and stumbled to the door, and threw it open; a flood of fresh air poured in and dissipated the racuous vapours, and the opening of the door showed the way to liberty. But I paused. Ysa still lay prone upon she floor. From her grasp I wrenched the cameo, still reeking with the foul fumes of phosphorus. I stepped acoss my prison's threshold and listened. All was silent. I stepped out entirely, and tiptoed along the hallway, pausing here and there to see if I had been discovered, forward again until I reached the door. Then carefully a couple of hundred paces—they must have slept the sleep of the stones that night—until at last I drew a breath of relief and broke into a run. How I ran through the darkness and rain, over rocks and through ditches, now up, now down, until the welcome lights of Syracuse rewarded my straining eye. Hurrying through the city, I entered my house. The good old housekeeper, with many pious ejaculations and thanks to the saints for my return, stared at me as one who sees a ghost.

"'The Signor Hurd!' she exclaimed, in answer to my impatient question, 'why he but arrived to-day, and was so fatigued he went immediately to bed. He did not even look at his mail.'

"'The mail? Oh, yes, give it to me. Donna Marie, I will hand it to him.'

"'Ah! thank you,' she said, as she passed me the numerous packages and letters.

"I only gave him part of them before leaving Syracuse the next morning, carrying with me the Baaltis cameo, whose secret cavity was thoroughly cleansed of the substance which no one knows who had put it there, or how many years ago."

"How about the flame, Mr. Gile?" I asked.

"Well," he said, handing me the cameo again, "you will find that besides the cavity beneath the white head of Baaltis, the golden setting which surrounds the entire stone is hollow. This tiny canal had an opening into the larger cavity, and was filled with oxygen. The spring which opens the top cover also opens the canal, and the pure oxygen rushing forth, instantaneously ignited the piece of phosphorus, thus generating the horrid vapour whose agency led me to freedom."

He paused and re-lit his pipe, then continued

"In the spring I was at Rome during the carnival. A woman, bent and drawn and blind, stopped and asked for alms. It was Ysa Cammorista."

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Hazel Harlow is in Sheffield this week.

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TOM THE HOOLIGAN.

TOM THE HOOLIGAN was a terror to the neighbourhood which he honoured with his presence.

Accompanied by choice spirits of his own calibre, he nightly paraded the streets in the slum which he called home. It was not a promising looking vicinity; but the inhabitants, despite their deadly poverty, were peaceful souls enough; and Tom and his gang created a nightly panic amongst them.

Old people and young girls were special prey of the Hooligans. They were nightly treated to rough horseplay, which usually ended in a street fray of more or less severe description, wherein respectable working men of the district confronted the Hooligans, and were more often than not, defeated by them.

Tom was a born leader. In another class of life and in more favourable circumstances he might have arrived at considerable fame. As it was, his gang adored him, and would have followed him with confidence and courage wherever he might choose to lead them. He led them into divers strange paths, and the terror in the neighbourhood grew apace.

The police were on the alert; but Tom had been accustomed from his cradle to eluding even that astute body, and though members of his gang had at one time and another fallen into the clutches of the law, Tom remained at large.

He was a gaunt, lean young fellow, of shambling gait, and shabby appearance, with, on the other hand, certain keenness of his eyes, and alertness in his bearing, which perhaps accounted for his undisputed leadership.

Tom the Hooligan was a masterful individual. It was a misfortune for the community that his energies were so unfortunately misdirected.

The doings of his gang came to a climax on a certain afternoon when London went mad over some of its returning troops. The occasion was the Hooligans' opportunity, and they made the most of it—with the result that many heads were broken, and other more or less serious injuries inflicted upon harmless citizens.

But the harmless citizens were not alone in their affliction; Tom himself was knocked down in one of the rushes which he had ordered, and when he was with difficulty extricated from the trampling of the mob he was found to be in no condition for the police-station. There was nothing for it, but to put him into an ambulance and trundle him off to the nearest hospital, the burly policeman who accompanied him relieving his feelings by making many incisive remarks to his victim as the they went on their way.

At the hospital gates some of the gang who had walked disconsolately beside him were turned back, but not before Tom had called to them:

"Come and see me in this 'ere bloomin' 'orspital. We'll make the coves wot's 'ere sit up a bit. They won't want none of us agin!"

Tom's tone was defiant, and the policeman thought it advisable to drop a whispered hint to the house surgeon as to the ungovernable nature of the patient he was admitting.

"Nobody can't do nothing with them 'Ooligans," he said despondingly. "I'm sorry to a' brought 'im in, sir—he'll give you a deal o' trouble; but there warn't nothing for it."

"Oh, it's all right," the surgeon answered cheerily. "Ward discipline will be a little experience for the young gentleman," and he glanced across at Tom, who lay scowling on the ambulance, aware that he was being discussed, but unable to catch the words.

Tom's head was dressed, his other wounds attended to in the surgery, the storm of bad language, groans, and cries he hurled at the house surgeon making that young gentleman say pleasantly: "Look here, my fine fellow, you'll have to curb your tongue a bit in the ward. Sister doesn't allow that sort of thing."

"Sister!" Tom snorted. "'Oo's *Sister?* I ain't goin' to do nothin' to please a bloomin' lot o' wimmen—not me! Don't you make no mistake about that!"

The house surgeon smiled pleasantly again, but said nothing.

"I ain't one as can be easy made to do what I don't choose," Tom muttered sulkily, as he was lifted on the stretcher. "There will be some in the ward sorry as ever they see me afore I'm done," he added darkly. "No bally wimmen don't manage Tom the Hooligan, not much!"

The end of this speech was lost upon his hearers, as the stretcher was hoisted up and carried across the courtyard into the big accident ward.

The lights of the ward as he was borne into it dazzled Tom's eyes. He caught a glimpse of lines of beds, and heard a clear voice say:

"No. 17 bed, please," and his next impression was of being laid upon something singularly soft and pleasant, and covered with a blanket. Tom had never in the course of his life lain upon a bed of this description before, his customary resting-place was a bundle of shavings and straw; and his aching limbs sank gratefully into the comfortable mattress. Screens stood round the bed, and after a few moments somebody came round the screens and stood beside him, a small lady, in a dark blue dress, with spotless cap and apron, and a pair of quiet grey eyes which twinkled a little as they met Tom's defiant glance.

She held a paper in her hand, and a pen.

"Will you tell me your name and address, please?" she said.

Tom's first instinct was to snort and decline. It was really to his own intense surprise that he found himself meekly giving the information wanted.

"Nurse is coming now to wash you," she said next. "After that, I daresay you will get a nice sleep."

"Wash me!" Tom jerked himself up in bed, thereby giving himself excruciating pain. "I don't want no washing. I——" he was about to launch forth on a stream of profanity, but the grey eyes that watched him seemed, as he afterwards expressed it, "ter take all the bloomin' sperrit out of a chap;" and he fell silent.

The small lady smiled at him. Her smile was very charming.

"Oh," she said, "you will feel ever so much more comfortable after nurse has washed you. It is a rule here, you know; and I am sure *you* will understand that we have to do what our leaders tell us."

The stress on the *you* appealed to Tom. *She* knew, at any rate, that he was accustomed to lead people. An answering smile stole over his sulky visage.

Tell your friends about Hazel Harlow.

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"Well," he said loftily, "I don't mind letting her have a go at me."

Perhaps Nurse Blake did not altogether enjoy the operation of washing the redoubtable Hooligan. His remonstrances were many; his language at times more forcible than polite; and when she had finished her thankless task and removed the screens, she said:

"Well, Seventeen, I don't know what Sister will say to you."

"'Oo cares what Sister says?" he shouted after her "'Oo is Sister?"

The man in the next bed looked at him and grinned.

"You'll soon find that out, my man. Sister's the boss o' this ward, and she don't stand no nonsense—you make no mistakes about it."

Tom laughed ironically and loudly.

"Not quite so much noise, here," said a soft voice, beside him—a voice that was very soft, and yet—and yet—Tom felt most unaccountably like a naughty little boy. He glanced up angrily. His eyes met again those cool grey ones with their twinkle of humour.

"I like everybody to be as cheerful and jolly as possible," the soft voice went on, "but I am sure you will understand, Seventeen, that we must not have noisy laughing and talking. One or two people are very bad in here, you see. I am sure you will give us no trouble."

Her eyes were full of faith in him, which surprised Tom. Nobody had ever believed anything good of him as far as he could remember in the whole course of his life. He had always lived up to the reputation of being a dog with a bad name.

"I don't want to give no trouble," he muttered—which was odd, considering his dark threats of upsetting the ward. "I only wants ter be left in peace."

"Yes; you must have a good sleep now. Only," all at once a masterful ring came into that soft voice, "remember, Seventeen, there must never be any more bad language whilst you are in here. No manly man ever swears at a woman, or before a woman."

Tom gasped. His eyes fell before the grey eyes that watched him. He squirmed uneasily. A hand that seemed to him marvellously soft was laid upon his hand.

"I know I can trust you," she said, and her voice had lost the masterfulness, and was very gentle again. Her smile stirred a chord in Tom's heart that had never before vibrated. Something in his throat choked him. He shut his eyes—well, because they suddenly stung with an unaccustomed sensation. Perhaps Sister saw and understood. She moved quietly away.

Tom opened his eyes cautiously and watched her. She was so very small, that he could have knocked her down easily with one of his great hands. A hot flush flamed over his face; he looked thoughtfully at his big red fist on the white sheet, and then back at the small figure walking down the ward.

"Well, you might have knocked me down with a feather!" he articulated aloud. "Ain't she a fair treat?"

"You're right there, mate," the man in 18 bed said. "She's a rare 'un, she is. See 'er manage this 'ere great Ward o' men. It makes you fair sit up, don't it—and such a little 'un, as she is, too?"

"That's what takes me," Tom answered slowly. "She ain't got a commandin' presence, in a manner o' speakin' —she've only got something in 'er eye, ain't she?"

"She's a real lady, she is," Eighteen said warmly. "She've a feelin' 'eart, and a understandin' one as well. She ain't one as will stand any nonsense."

That fact soon became patent to Tom; yet it remained a mystery to him why he gave in to her, as he expressed it. The extraordinary thing was that he, who was accustomed to sprinkle every sentence he spoke with language of a lurid and sanguinary description, now pulled himself up instantly if the mildest oath came to his lips.

"Most funny thing, ain't it?" he confided to his neighbour. "Seems as if something rose up inside of yer and stopped yer sayin' things when she's about. Funny thing, too—fer she's only a little bit of a thing, as yer might say."

Yes, she was only a little bit of a thing—that was true enough; but she knew how to manage a ward of thirty-two men. Something in its peaceful atmosphere kept them good, she averred; but whether it was really that, or whether it was the presence of soft-voiced, gentle-handed women always about them, or whether it was Sister's own personality, is impossible to say. The fact remained. No bad language was ever heard in Accident Ward at St. Chad, and even that outrageous young person, Tom the Hooligan, was becoming subdued.

On his first Sunday in the hospital several members of his gang rollicked up to the gates, with a pleasurable expectation of "making a rare old shine" within the walls. Only three of them were admitted by the big porter, whose word of advice as to behaviour they passed by in scorn and with protruding tongues. They talked loudly as they crossed the courtyard, and they were heard to boast that they "warn't goin' out of the bally orspital without giving it a taste o' the rough side o' their fists."

Still talking loudly, they jostled other visitors through the door of the ward, and were proceeding between the rows of beds, with their hats on their heads and a general air of jauntiness, when their progress was suddenly stopped.

Sister, coming from the other end of the ward, met them and blocked their path, standing still and surveying them quietly from head to foot. Her gaze lingered longest on their hats. They grew restive under it, and their hands went instinctively to their heads.

"Thank you," she said, her eyes twinkling; "yes, that is what I meant. No man comes in here with his hat on."

The Hooligans' hats were off before she had finished speaking. Silent awe held them dumb.

"And I must ask you to go quietly to the patient you want to see, please," she went on. "I expect it is No. 17 bed you are looking for. Will you kindly talk and laugh with as little noise as possible. Some of these sick are very ill, you know."

The Hooligans were still speechless. They moved on, limply and on tiptoe. The impertinences they had planned outside the gates slipped away from them; their swagger was transferred into a nervous shuffle.

Tom greeted them with effusion, doing the honours of the ward like the oldest inhabitant; but when his friends, recovering from their speechlessness, began to swear softly, he frowned.

"Look 'ere," he said, "don't you let me 'ear none o' that in 'ere. Sister don't 'low it."

His boon companions gazed at him open-mouthed.

"Sister? 'Oo's Sister? And 'oo is it 'lows you to do things, and not to do 'em?" They sniggered feebly.

"Sister's the boss o' this 'ere ward," Tom asserted firmly, "and them as comes 'ere does what she says; and if you're a-comin' to see me, you've got to do the same."

Hazel Harlow will travel from town to town.

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The faithful three gazed at Tom. They had a dim notion that he might be a bit dotty.

"Ain't yer made 'em all sit up—like you said yer would?" one of the party ventured to say feebly.

"It ain't no manner o' use your tryin' to talk o' things yer don't understand," Tom answered loftily. "There's some folks as you *can* get at, and some as you can't. Sister's one o' them as gets at *you* if you was to try it on—which you don't never do," he added reflectively.

"She ain't very big, neither," murmured one of the three.

"It ain't bigness as does it," Tom said. "It's something inside o' 'er, what comes out and 'its yer. It's through 'er being a real *lidy*, that's where it is. She've got a somethin' in 'er what yer can't 'elp obeyin'."

The three, remembering the awe that had stolen over them when she confronted them, did not dispute Tom's words.

They talked in whispers whilst still in the ward, and stole away like mice afterwards!

Sister's interest in Tom, roused at first by the very fact of his attempted defiance, grew each day that he was in the hospital. Being a woman of insight, she saw what fine possibilities lay beneath that gaunt and awkward exterior.

"Tom," she said to him one day, "do you know that, if you liked, you could be a very fine man?"

"*Me?* Now yer gettin' at me, Sister!" he ejaculated, grinning sheepishly, and flushing to the roots of his lank hair.

"No, I am not. I mean it. You never will be a fine man, of course, whilst you spend your time in loafing round and leading a gang of idle young vagabonds into mischief. But I don't believe you will really go on doing anything so silly."

Tom glared at her, but her cool glance made him wince.

"Well, if yer ain't got nothing to amuse yer, it don't seem silly to be the leader of a gang. We've been a fair terror down our way," pride showed in his voice.

"I daresay—though I don't see much to boast of in that. Now, I should have thought that anybody with your gift for leading," Tom flushed with pleasure, "would have wanted to lead something better than a party of stupid boys. Why don't you be a soldier, Tom?"

"Why don't you be a soldier, Tom?" The words swung to and fro in Tom's brain all through the days that followed, and Sister missed no opportunity of urging her advice upon him. She was a soldier's daughter herself, she told Tom, and it would make her feel very proud if she could persuade him to serve with the Colours.

When he talked it over with his gang on Sunday they told him frankly they thought he was "a bit balmy in the crumpet"—which, being interpreted, signified off his head. But Tom did not heed them. Sister's words had gone home.

Perhaps it was only want of occupation and love of excitement that had made Tom into a Hooligan; for, certain it is that even the wearisome process of being turned into a soldier did not dishearten him. And though his old gang still describe him as "a bit gone in the upper storey," for submitting to drills and other regulations, they have a sneaking admiration for his smart appearance and upright bearing.

And Sister prizes, as she prizes few things, a photograph on her mantelpiece that represents a young, tall soldier, with an alert face, and bears under it, in scrawling characters, the words "Tom the Hooligan."

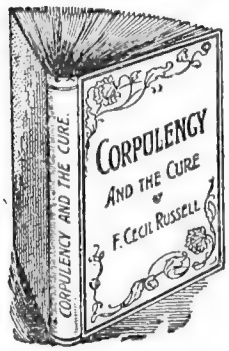
L. G. MOBERLY.

THE COST OF CORPULENCY AND THE COST OF ITS CURE.

THE mortality tables published from time to time demonstrate, amongst other alarming facts, that deaths from heart disease are as numerous as ever; but those dry official statistics do not show what an appalling proportion of these deaths from cardiac disease are due to more or less excessive corpulency. Nevertheless, it is an established fact that obesity is one of the most fatal causes of heart and liver affections. Listen to this significant pronouncement by an eminent authority: "An excess of fat not only becomes burdensome and unsightly, but a positive evil, and frequently an absolute danger. An accumulation of it may occur between the muscles upon the heart, causing embarrassed respiration, or around the kidneys, and persons in this condition are extremely liable to disease in the vital organs." Again, our authority says: "Those suffering from an accumulation of abdominal subcutaneous fat, sometimes several inches in depth, carry also an enormous weight of fat around the internal organs, and *are prone to the diseases known as fatty degeneration of the heart and liver.*"

This, then, is the cost of corpulency, not to speak of the extreme discomfort, and even suffering, which it causes in the oppressively hot weather—the weakness and exhaustion, the feverishness, the loss of appetite, the utter prostration and entire loss of energy, physical and mental.

As to the cost of its cure we cannot do better than refer our interested readers to the source of the remarks we have quoted above. We allude to the exhaustive treatise entitled "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), by the eminent specialist, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, who has made this subject peculiarly his own, and has succeeded in effecting thousands of cures in cases where all other systems have proved abortive. Mr. Russell's lifelong researches have been directed to the discovery of a *permanent and radical cure* of obesity, and how far he has been successful may be gathered from the many hundreds of cases personally vouched for by the patients themselves, extracts from whose grateful letters are given in the book, together with copious excerpts from the press. In order to prove the absolutely harmless nature of the compound which forms the basis of Mr. Russell's treatment, Mr. Russell also gives the recipe. This is of purely innocuous vegetable ingredients. Moreover, the treatment is pleasant and easy, does not interfere with the ordinary avocations, and entails no irrational limitations as to food and drink. Our readers, by sending two penny stamps to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C., may obtain a copy of this remarkable treatise under plain sealed envelope, when they will find out for themselves that the cost of the cure is as a drop in the ocean compared to what the cost of neglect may be.



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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, September 2nd. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. C. F. Salmon, of 86 Claybrook Road, Hammersmith, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

If some men were half as big as they think they are, the world would have to be enlarged.

Prospective Litigant: "You give legal advice here, don't you?" Lawyer (absent-mindedly): "No, we sell it."

Anxious Mother: "I don't understand how it is, Bertie, that you are at the bottom of your class." Bertie: "I don't understand it myself; but I know it's dreadful easy."

Mother: "Johnny, I see your little brother has the smaller apple. Did you give him his choice, as I suggested?" Johnny: "Yes'm. I told him he could have his choice, the little one or none, and he took the little one."

Mistress: "Not going to marry that sweep after all, Jane? Why, I thought it was all settled."* Jane: "So it was, mum; but the fact is, I saw him with a clean face for the first time last night, and I can't marry him! You've no idea how ugly he is when he's washed, mum."

A lawyer addressed the Court as "Gentlemen" instead of "Your honours." After he had concluded, a brother of the Bar reminded him of his error. He immediately rose to apologise thus: "May it please the Court, in the heat of the debate I called your honours gentlemen. I make a mistake, and beg pardon."

Notwithstanding this age of School Boards and Free Education it is surprising and ludicrous to read the excuses sent by parents for the absence of their children. Here is one: "Please excuse Johnnie for being absent, he had the tooth*ake* to oblige his mother who was whitewashing his father." Punctuation is of no account here.

*He was a naughty little brother; but little brothers are always naughty on such occasions. His sister's young man was sitting in the drawing-room patiently waiting when Tommy opened fire with: "Are you going to propose to my sister to-night?" "Why I—er—er—er—er—what do you mean?" stammered the young man. "Oh, nothing! Only if you are, you ain't going to surprise her. At dinner just now, she bribed me an' me brother to go to bed at half-past seven. She has hung four Cupid or stupid pictures on the parlour wall, moved the sofa into the darkest corner, got ma and pa to go calling next door, shut the dog in the cellar, and been practisin', 'Because I Love You' on the pianner all the afternoon. You'll get her all right, only if she tells you 'bout its being sudden, tell her it's all bunkum!"

The man who believes only half he hears generally gets along pretty well if he selects the right half.

"I would not recall the passed," sang the fellow who had successfully disposed of a counterfeit sovereign.

"At last I have reached the turning point of my life," remarked the convict when they put him on the treadmill.

Tag: "They say that old Growler is a man who will stop at nothing." Wag: "Old habits, I suppose. I hear he used to be a hansom-cab driver."

Busybody: "Hallo! old fellow, how came you so dreadfully hoarse?" Korfer: "Adswerigg the fools that asked me how I caught this cold. Good bordigg!"

Footelightes: "Gussie, of course, will insist upon being included in the theatricals. What part shall we assign to him?" Foster: "Well, eh—I should say he'd be available as—as—first walking-stick."

Budding Dramatist: "Have you been able to make use of my new play?" Callous Manager: "We have already used it. We found it available for the snowstorm scene in the second act of our great melodrama."

He: "What has become of that pretty Miss Barclay who was visiting you last summer?" She: "She's joined the great majority." He: "You don't mean to say she's dead?" She: "Oh, no! She married a man named Smith."

Clerk of the Court: "Remember, my good woman, you are on your oath, and must speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Mrs. M'Carthy: "Well, thin, out av politeness I'd have kept it to mesilf, but if I must spake the whole truth—sure, then, ye're the ugliest man I've ivvor sot eyes on."

Jack: "My darling, I want to tell you something. I have deceived you. I am not rich, but utterly penniless. Will it make any difference to you?" Ethel: "Not the slightest." Jack: "I am so glad, dearest. Are you quite sure it will make no difference to you?" Ethel: "Quite sure. I can marry old Moneybags."

Mrs. Smith (thoughtfully): "I'm afraid I shall have to stop giving Bobby that tonic the doctor left for him." Mr. Smith (anxiously): "Why, isn't he any better?" Mrs. Smith: "Oh, yes! But he has slid down the banisters six times this morning, broken the hall lamp, two vases, a pitcher, and a looking-glass, and I don't feel as if I could stand much more."

Traveller: "I've got some notices that I'm selling to shopkeepers everywhere. Everybody buys 'em. Here's one—'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask For It!'" Country Tradesman: "Think I want to be bothered with people asking for things I haven't got? Give me one reading—'If You Don't See What You Want, Ask for Something Else!'"

The gas was turned low. Scarcely a glimmer gleamed. Young Camera clasped in his arms the slender form of the beautiful heiress, and her roseate cheek pressed the waistcoat button nearest his heart. Her dulcet "Yes!" to the momentous question which concerned the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of these two loving hearts still trembled upon the enraptured air. "And yet," exclaimed young Camera, exultantly, through the circumambient, impassioned darkness, "and yet they say negatives are developed in a dark room."

Hazel Harlow will be in Newcastle next week.

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STRANGE MENTAL POWERS.

HOW PEOPLE ARE INFLUENCED.

Startling Words from the Committee Appointed to Investigate Hypnotism for the Benefit of Journal Readers.

REV. PAUL WELLER,
Gorham, N.Y.

G. S. LINCOLN, M.D.,
101 Crutchfield Street,
Dallas, Tex.

F. H. STOUFER,
Sec. & Treas. of Railway
Conductors, Pueblo, Col.

JUDGE HENRY SCHAFER,
Flemington, N.J.

Hypnotism is no longer a myth, a fanciful creation of the mind, but a reality, a most potent power, capable of producing infinite good. For the purpose of ascertaining the exact value of this much-talked-of power, a committee, composed of a physician, a well-known jurist, a prominent minister, and a leading railroad man, was appointed to investigate Hypnotism.

The committe carried on a series of investigations in regard to the power of Hypnotism to influence the actions and deeds of people in the everyday walks of life.

The first step taken by the members of the committee was to master the science in every detail, so that they might state from personal experience the good or evil this strange power might produce. They wrote the New York Institute of Science, of Rochester, N.Y., the greatest school of Hypnotism and Occult Sciences in the world, and received full and complete instructions in regard to how hypnotism may be used to influence people in business, how to use it in treating diseases, etc., etc. In a few days they mastered these instructions and were full-fledged hypnotists.

It was clearly demonstrated that hypnotism may be employed so that the person operated upon is entirely unconscious of the fact that he is being influenced; and, all things considered, the committee regard it as the most valuable discovery of modern times. A knowledge of it is essential to one's success in life and well being in society.

Dr. Lincoln says, after a thorough investigation, that he considers it the most marvellous therapeutic or curative agent of modern times.

Judge Schafer, although a legal light, turned his attention to healing the sick, and in a few treatments he completely cured John E. Myers, of Flemington, N.J., of a strange malady that had kept him bedfast for nine years, and which the doctors said must surely kill him. Judge Schafer's fame spread for miles around, and hundreds of people applied to him for treatment.

Mr. Stoufer performed the astonishing feat of hypnotising Mr. Cunningham, of Pueblo, Col., at a distance of several blocks. He also hypnotised an aged gentleman and had him run through the streets shouting "Redhot peanuts for sale." Mr. Stoufer says it is indispensable to one's business success.

Rev. Paul Weller says that every minister and every mother should understand hypnotism for the benefit they can be to those with whom they are brought in daily contact.

In speaking of this marvellous power, President Eliot, of Harvard College, said to the graduates: "Young gentlemen, there is a subtle power lying latent in each of you, which few of you have developed, but which, when developed, might make a man irresistible. It is called Personal Magnetism or Hypnotism. I advise you to master it."

The New York Institute of Science has just issued 10,000 copies of a book which fully explains all the secrets of this marvellous power, and gives explicit directions for becoming a practical hypnotist, so that you can employ the force without the knowledge of any one. Anybody can learn. Success is guaranteed.

The book also contains a full report of the members of the committee. It will be sent absolutely free to anyone who is interested. A penny postal card will bring it. Write to-day. Address:

NEW YORK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE (Dept. VA21), **ROCHESTER, N.Y., U.S.A.**

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Those who are reading "Adventures of an Actress" will see that Hazel Harlow is this week in Sheffield, *next* week she will be in Newcastle. These thrilling stories are attracting a great deal of attention, and their influence on the circulation of *Short Stories* is very marked. But although this is so I do not wish you to relax your efforts on behalf of the paper. This time of the year is an exceptionally good one for obtaining new readers, and a word of recommendation to an acquaintance in the train or on the beach is calculated to do an immense amount of good.

Advice on Love and other Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"Alice" writes to ask me how shall she break off her engagement with her lover. "When I first met him," she says, "I thought he was just the man for a suitable husband. He was a teetotaler, a non-smoker, and had recently become a member of the church; he was apparently kind and pleasant to everyone he met and most charming in his manner to me. But since then I have discovered that all this must be put on for the purpose of winning me. He treats his widowed mother in a way which no gentleman would do, he is always in debt, although I know he earns good money, he has taken to drinking and smoking and seldom goes to church now. I feel sure that we shall never be happy, but as I have given my promise to marry him, I don't know how to break off the engagement. And I feel certain that he will try to hold me to my promise."

I dare say he will try, "Alice," but you must act with decision and courage. Why should you tie yourself up to a man who will make you miserable for life? The only way to deal with him is to tell him plainly and firmly, but, of course, politely, that you feel the marriage would not be a happy one, and that you decline to continue the engagement. Never mind his bluster or his threats to tell everyone that you are fickle or anything of that kind. You have your future happiness to consider, and that is the great thing. A man who will ill-treat his widowed mother will certainly try to bully you into keeping your engagement, but you must not be frightened, and your friends will soon understand why you are acting thus. Don't forget to write to me again to tell me how you are getting on. I am only too pleased to help my readers.

"Gourmond" has the best little wife in the world; but she is an awfully bad manager. She has £2 10s. a week, just for the current expenses, and never manages to make two ends meet. They live at Brighton in a nice little house, and keep a pony and trap, two servants, and "Gourmond" considers she ought to do better than she does.

It certainly depends, "Gourmond," upon what you mean by "current expenses." If your wife has to pay for coals, gas or oil, servants' wages, and food for the pony, I consider you are very unreasonable to expect her to make two ends meet. Write again, more definitely, and I will give you a rough sketch of what your household expenses ought to come to.

"Unknown One" writes to know if there is any harm in a girl of seventeen allowing any man she has the least liking for to kiss and flirt with her. She does not think there are many girls now-a-days, who do not enjoy kissing and flirting. And for her part, she sees no harm in it.

I am afraid your knowledge of girls is very limited, "Unknown One," for very few nice girls could behave in so unladylike a manner. *There are* girls who find pleasure in flirting, but for the most part, it is the men who set girls a bad example in this respect.

"Worried Doris" writes to ask me to give her advice on the following point. A man she does not know in the least, except by sight, and has never spoken to, has written to her, asking her to meet him secretly.

Take no notice whatever of his letter, "Worried Doris." Tell your parents all about it, and if you have any further annoyance from him, get your father to write and threaten him with the police if ever he troubles you again.

"Runaway Dick" fell in love with a young man ten months ago. He left home and went into a situation and they had to part. She then heard that all his friends were against him going out with her, and it made her feel so miserable that she sat down and wrote him a heart-broken letter. Since then she has been very sorry, and three weeks before Easter she wrote and asked him to forgive her for writing such a letter to him, and told him she could never love another like she did him. He did not answer her, and she has only seen him once since, when he bowed and smiled; she lives in hopes they shall meet again, and asks if it will be wise if she goes out for a holiday, for her to call on him and ask him to meet her.

Yes, "Runaway Dick," I see no harm in your doing so. Hasty letters are always a mistake, but as you have written and explained that you did not mean what you wrote, I am sure you will find that he is willing to take no further notice of it.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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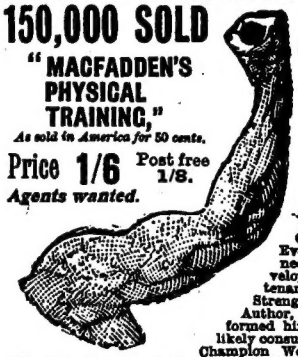

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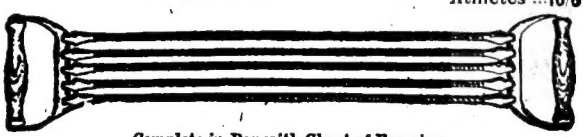

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